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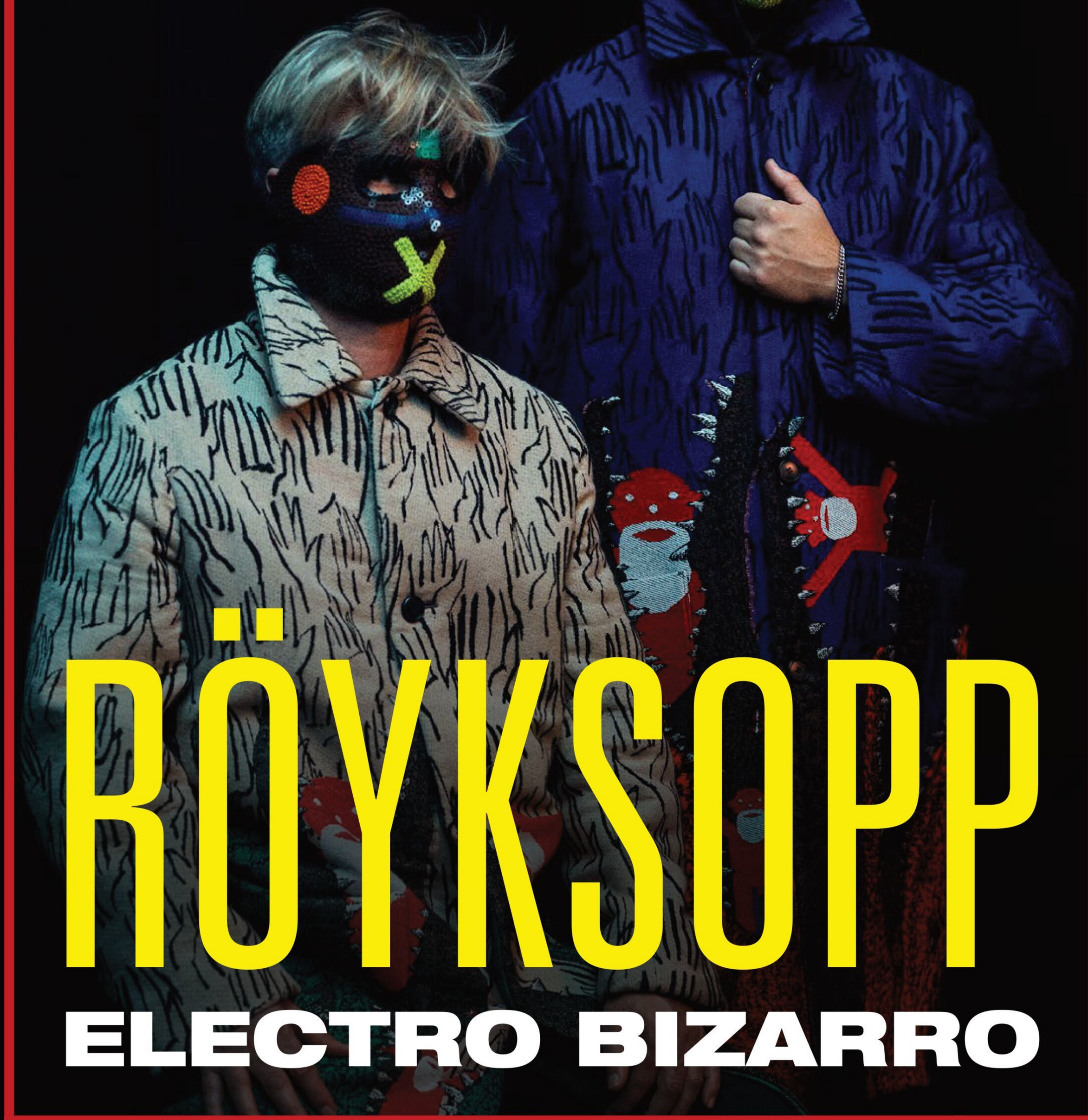

BÖYKSOPP

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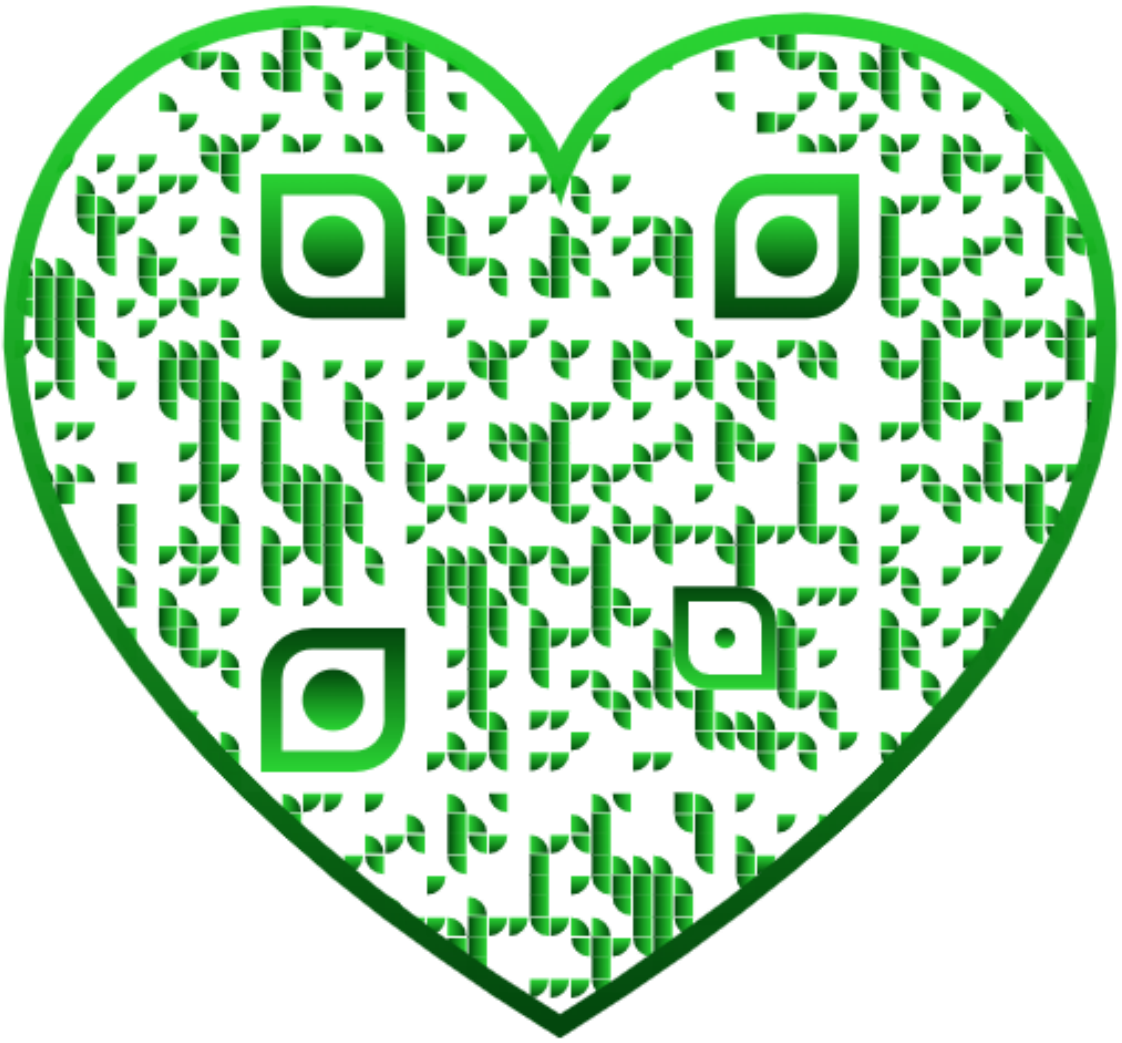

WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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Even at their most obviously pop moments – and there have been plenty of those over the last two decades, many of them truly glorious – there's always been something a bit weird and unsettling about Röyksopp. If you've seen them play live, for instance, you'll know they have a fondness for oddball outfits. So when we decided to put the Norwegian duo on the cover of Electronic Sound, we suspected they wouldn't be posing for pictures in their trackies and trainers. As you've probably already worked out, we weren't disappointed.

Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland talk about what they call their "quirkiness" in our fascinating interview with them. Some of it they put down to growing up in the remote city of Tromsø, a place 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle which they describe as "a David Lynch landscape". The sun never sets in June and it never rises in December. That must have an effect on your wiring, right?

Röyksopp are on a roll right now. And then some. Having released a new album in April – their first for eight years – they're bringing out another one this month. The two records, 'Profound Mysteries' and 'Profound Mysteries II', find Berge and Brundtland as mercurial as ever, moving seamlessly through a range of electronic styles ably assisted by guests such as Alison Goldfrapp and Pixx. The group have also commissioned some amazing graphics to accompany the music, turning 'Profound Mysteries' into a wider art project. The 20 tracks on the albums are each accompanied by a short film, most of them pretty bizarre and some of them pretty subversive too, making those pop moments the duo are so good at crafting all the more unnerving.

Another highlight of this issue is our blockbuster review of Bluedot 2022, which is the first time the Jodrell Bank jamboree of music, science and cosmic culture has taken place since 2019. Did our roving reporter Stephen Dalton really rove so far and so wide that he managed to see every single artist on the bill, including Björk, Public Service Broadcasting, Hannah Peel, Squarepusher, Anna Meredith, LoneLady, Groove Armada, Metronomy and about a million others? You bet your big telescope he did.

If you're looking for more great names, well, we have got them for you. As well as speaking to Röyksopp, we've also interviewed Gwenno, Working Men's Club, Ron Trent, Anne Dudley, Caterina Barbieri and Yann Tiersen. Gwenno's 'Tresor' album has just been nominated for the Mercury Prize, by the way. That's one to put on your shopping list, then.

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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CONRAD SCHNITZLER: “SOMETIMES IT GETS OUT OF HAND AND TURNS INTO MUSIC”

Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf

11 JUNE – 14 AUGUST 2022

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS

“At the time, I wanted to reproduce what I knew from my time as a locksmith – the noise from the factory buildings – with instruments. I didn’t want normal scales, and I couldn’t even play them. That was my freedom: not being able to do anything. Sometimes it got out of hand and turned into music.”

These words from Conrad Schnitzler appear at the entrance to the “concrete block” Kunsthalle museum in Düsseldorf – Schnitzler’s home city – as part of a titular exhibition that celebrates the electronic music pioneer’s extensive “intermedia” work from the 1970s and 80s. A revealing glimpse into the psyche of a man who also went by the names “Conrad Von Berlin”, “Con” and “Schnittles” – he had quite a fondness for aliases – the show speaks volumes about his innovative, independent and often whimsical creative approach.

Most widely known as a former member of Kluster and Tangerine Dream, Schnitzler trod his own radical path beyond those era-defining groups. Düsseldorf in the 1970s was an incubator of electronic music, but his artistic foundation was also built in the 1960s when he studied sculpture at Düsseldorf’s art academy under Joseph Beuys. Schnitzler worked prolifically throughout his life as a visual artist, performer, composer and musician, more often than not blurring the line between all of the above.

Stepping inside the exhibition space is like cracking open a door in Schnitzler’s shaven head and peering into the inner workings of his marvellous brain. A long, low-lit room is filled with TV monitors and video projectors, all simultaneously screening 17 of his audiovisual works, while the accompanying sound for each piece – either shuddering and industrial or vibrant and melodic – fills the room on a rotating loop.

There are flickering abstract shapes and patterns, some in muted colour and others in black and white, sculpted by Schnitzler using slides and Super 8 film that he would scratch, paint on and collage with.

The spatial experience of sound was of key importance to him, and the layout of the room – refreshingly free of any explanatory accompanying text – feels discombobulating at first, but it’s not long before you slip into his wavelength. This is Schnitzler’s universe, and his work expands endlessly like beguiling constellations.

One video shows him drifting across the screen like an extraterrestrial, wearing a helmet with a megaphone speaker attached – in the early 80s, Schnitzler would often walk around Berlin wearing a white suit and his “sound helmet”, with a tape recorder on his belt. As the exhibition catalogue notes, “He played his cassette concerts and also sold the cassettes, which the authorities could not prevent as long as he kept moving. His home address was on every cassette, which resulted in a lively correspondence with an international network over the years.”

In another short film, he reflects on how “art that dissipates in the air is art that is worth something”.

A detailed and provocative insight into the lesser-known side of Conrad Schnitzler, the exhibition is a fascinating and deep delve into the mind of a true music maverick whose legacy lives on and on.

CONRAD SCHNITZLER, 1982 © CONRAD SCHNITZLER ESTATE - PHOTO: GISELA SCHNITZLER

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Röyksopp
‘Denimclad Baboons’ / ‘It Was A Good Thing’
Dark blue vinyl seven-inch

This month’s seven-inch single features two tracks from Röyksopp’s fabulous new album, the Norwegian duo’s second long-player in the space of just a few months

‘DENIMCLAD BABOONS’

The A-side of this month’s limited edition Electronic Sound seven-inch is the opening track of Röyksopp’s brand-new album, ‘Profound Mysteries II’. Following on from where their first ‘Profound Mysteries’ album left off only four months ago, ‘Denimclad Baboons’ is a larger-than-life funky banger that’s not afraid to be self-referential. There are some cheeky nods back to the group’s 2001 debut, ‘Melody AM’ – a platinum record in the UK – plus lots of dirty and futuristic sub-bass to carry it forward.

“A lot of the tracks on the ‘Profound Mysteries’ albums are either pointing towards previous stages in Röyksopp’s musical past or they are meant as tributes to the artists and genres we have admired over the years,” says Svein Berge. “The esoteric ear will find many such breadcrumbs throughout these records. I would love to say that ‘Denimclad Baboons’ is some sort of euphemism, but I think it is probably more accurate to call it an allegory. As the title and the production suggest – and indeed the track itself – it’s all about having fun.”

“I think the word ‘fun’ really is the key here because we had such a good time recording it,” adds Torbjørn Brundtland. “But then we have always enjoyed all the work we’ve done. And that’s very important to us. For me, it’s unfathomable that somebody can create something and not totally enjoy the process.”

‘IT WAS A GOOD THING’

Flip the disc over to experience the other side of Röyksopp – contemplative, wistful and a little unsettling. Another highlight of ‘Profound Mysteries II’, ‘It Was A Good Thing’ is a collaboration with UK synthpop star Pixx, aka Hannah Rodgers, who has released two acclaimed albums on 4AD.

“There’s definitely a melancholic side to Röyksopp and ‘It Was A Good Thing’ is a clear example of that,” explains Berge. “It’s a curious fact, though, because neither Torbjørn nor myself are particularly melancholic as people. For some reason, we just sometimes exhibit it in our music. It’s not a deliberate choice we make, but for some inexplicable reason we occasionally end up in that space. Perhaps we are only confident about exploring that emotion when it’s expressed within our music.”

Röyksopp have teamed up with dozens of guest singers during the last 20 years and Berge is full of praise for Pixx’s contribution to the track.

“It’s about angles and how we approach the different subject matters,” he says. “I’ve my own way of writing lyrics and melodies, but then Pixx has her creative style too. By combining our ideas, it makes for something more interesting. Torbjørn and I always spend a lot of time forging our sonic landscapes and there are two reasons for that. First, we like creating sounds that are uniquely ours, which steers us away from being generic. Second, we really enjoy shaping all our sounds and textures from scratch. It’s a labour of love, so hopefully that comes across on our records.”

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HARANGUE THE DJ

Strange stories from behind the decks

Following in the footsteps of Fesshole, the Twitter account where people anonymously confess to life moments they'd rather forget, a new project called "Are You The DJ?" wants to know the most ludicrous things ever said to you while DJing. Launched last month by illustrator Tim Easley and BBC 6 Music host Deb Grant, the submissions so far demonstrate some top-drawer shithousery from audiences, such as when Grant was grilled by a punter who asked her, "Is this real vinyl, or is it digital?". Do you have a good tale of your own? Go to their Twitter page to submit. **twitter.com/areyouthedj**

BRING THE NOISE

West Country project gets the kids fired up

If you know any youngsters in Cornwall with even a passing interest in music, point them in the direction of the Cornwall Youth Noise Orchestra. The brainchild of Matt Ashdown, co-director of Cornwall participatory arts organisation Moogie Wonderland, the "innovative and playful" project began in March this year as a way to give children aged eight to 14 a free pathway into making experimental music. The kids don't hang about either.

"They have really run with it and made it their own, with a level of maturity that exceeds their age," says Ashdown. "It's as if they've been listening to the likes of Daphne Oram, Broadcast, Deerhoof and Kid Koala for years!" A considerable number of sessions have already taken place, including one led by the Radiophonic Workshop's Peter Howell, and you can hear some of the Orchestra's recordings online. **cornwallyouthnoiseorchestra.bandcamp.com**

WARE THE BUCK STOPS

Music icon pens his life story

After announcing 'Electronically Yours, Vol 1' early last year, Martyn Ware's autobiography will finally be published by Little Brown at the end of this month. Detailing his experience of growing up in post-war Sheffield and his era-defining work as part of The Human League and Heaven 17, Ware says that writing the book allowed him to reflect on his inner world, including his politics as a "proud socialist", and how that still influences his life and work to this day.

"I enjoyed the process, and discovered a lot about myself," he explains. "I'm not a naturally reflective person – I prefer to 'do' things and then move on quickly – so being forced to engage with and forensically analyse my past was like visiting a foreign planet."

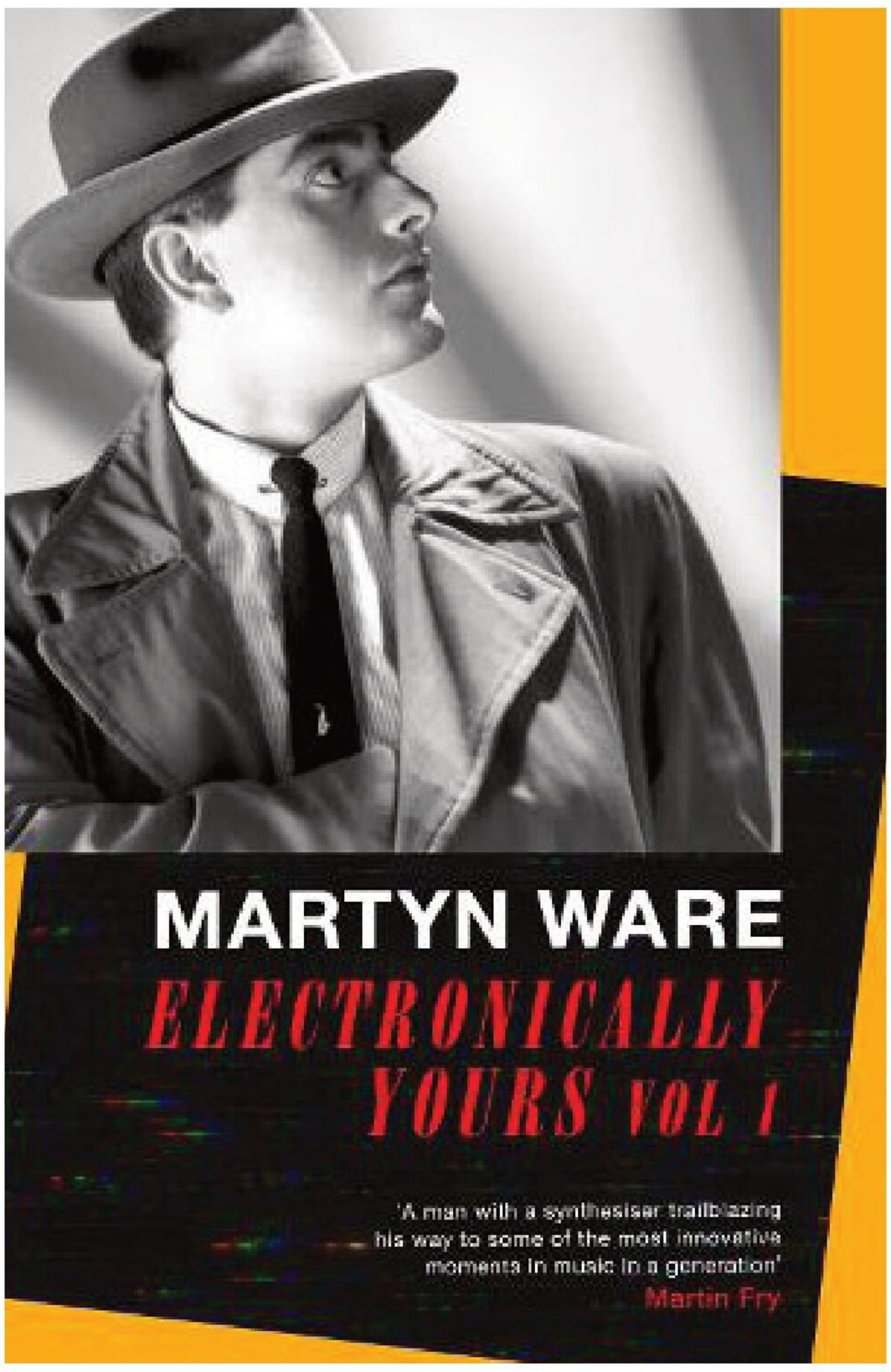
Ware says that he has considered writing a book about his life for many years, but that finding the time has always been an obstacle.

"When Covid came along, I was desperate to fill my time, so I spent two years researching, writing and refining."

You've probably noted something about the title – the 'Vol 1' bit. Should we expect another book?

"If 'Vol 1' is well-received, I will write 'Vol 2', to cover 1993 to present," reveals Ware. "I would also like to produce a written compilation of the best bits from my podcast series, 'Electronically Yours', featuring many, many famous and fascinating people from the worlds of music, comedy, production and creativity."

Where do we sign? Get your hardback copy of 'Electronically Yours, Vol 1' now for £20. **littlebrown.co.uk**



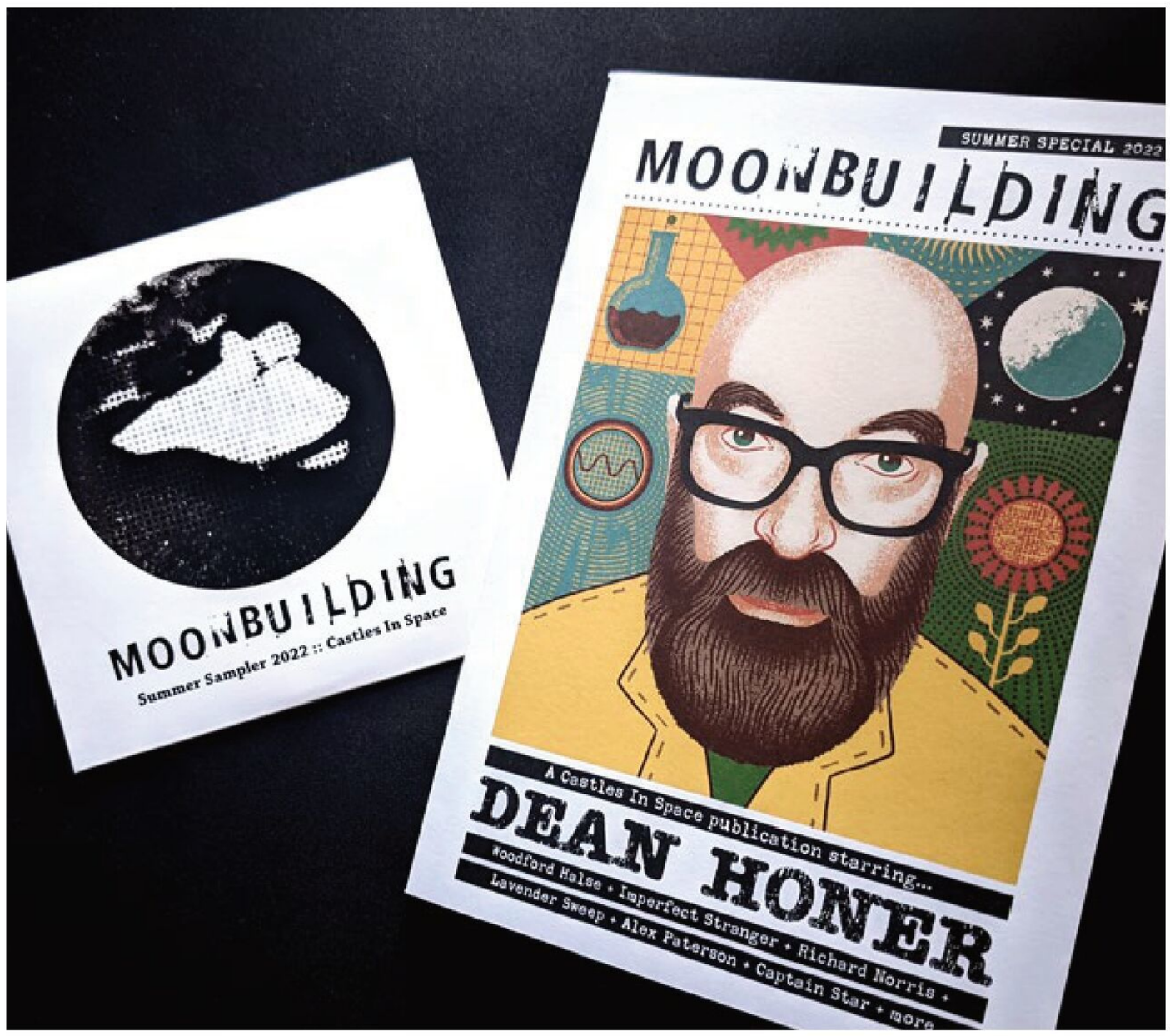
A BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

Former ES commissioning editor creates one-man zine

When Neil Mason told us he planned on taking some time away from writing about music, no one believed him. Never in a month of Sundays could you keep the man away from electronic music, as proven by Moonbuilding, his fab new zine released by Castles In Space.

"I've always loved the old-school music fanzines," says Mason, "so when I left ES I thought I'd have a go at putting one together around this DIY scene. Colin at Castles In Space said he'd publish it, so off we went. The idea was it'd all be done by me… which was pretty stupid looking at the amount of work that went into the first issue. Writing the 25,000-odd words was good fun, designing a whole mag was pretty daunting, but I do like a challenge."

The 48-page Moonbuilding Summer Special is out now, featuring interviews with the likes of The Sound Of Science's Dean Honer, Richard Norris, Woodford Halse's Mat Handley, and reviews of recent releases. You can order a copy, and get the 13-track CIS sampler, for £10. **moonbuilding.bandcamp.com**



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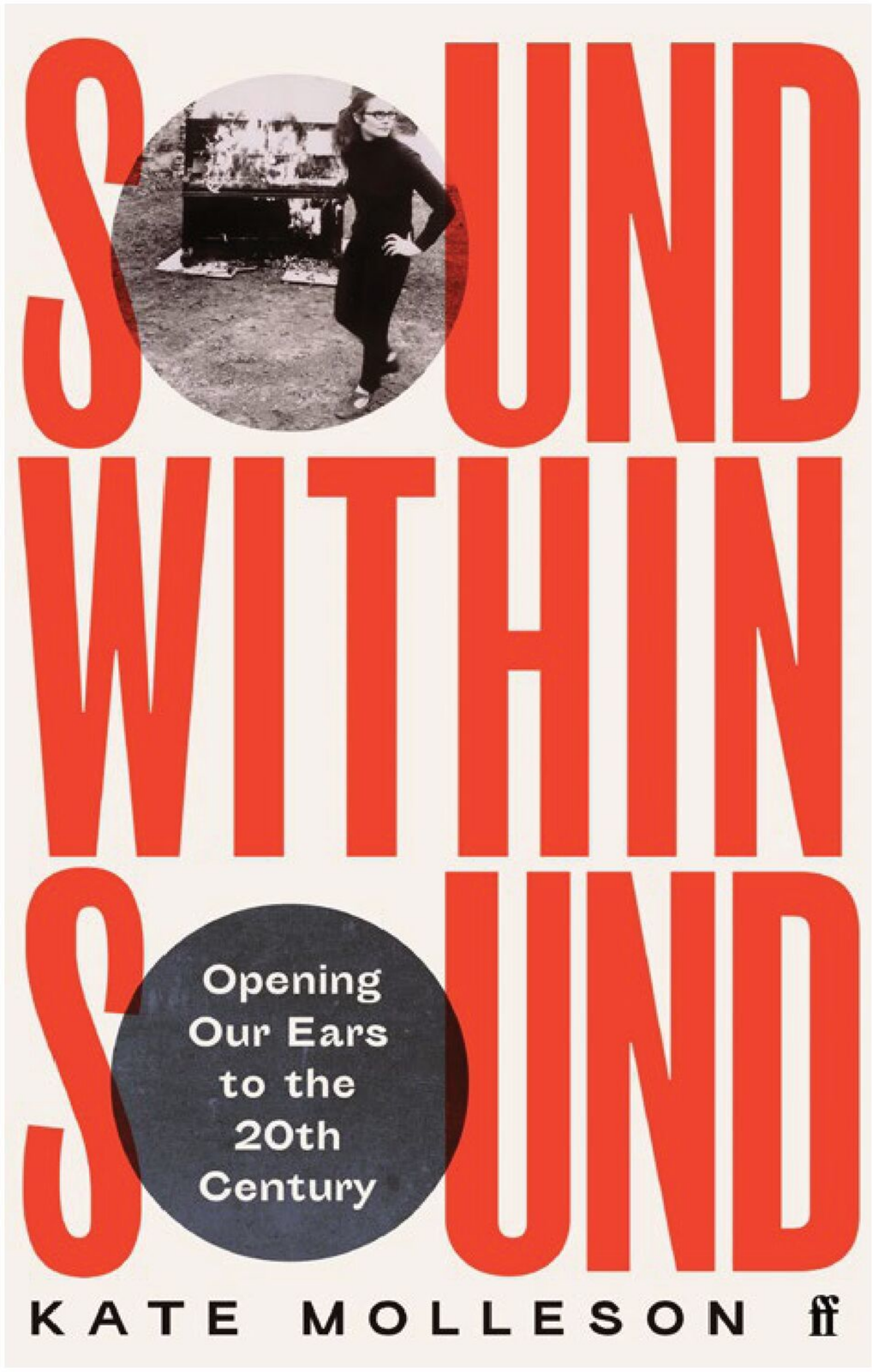
FREE RADICALS

One of this year's essential books, **Kate Molleson**'s 'Sound Within Sound' explores the work of 10 composers who reinvented 20th century music but whose names you might not be familiar with

WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH



When Kate Molleson confided in the great experimental music scholar George E Lewis about an idea she had for a book, he listened, gave her a few encouraging words, finished his bagel, and quietly left the room.

Molleson begins 'Sound Within Sound', her phenomenal new book about 10 radical composers from the 20th century – all largely ignored by the history books – with this little anecdote. Lewis might not have said much during their brief exchange, yet Molleson remembers how his support gave her the confidence to write the kind of music book she wanted to – an anti-dogmatic, non-linear swashbuckling trip through some of the world's most adventurous sonic experimenters, all while taking in the knotty reality of human lives, diverse geographies, musical approaches and a rainbow of identities.

When I meet Molleson on a bright Monday morning, she's on a lunch break from recording the audiobook version of 'Sound Within Sound'. Her inspiration for the book, she says, stems from "a lingering sense of frustration". As a classical music critic and host of BBC Radio 3's New Music Show and Music Matters programmes, Molleson would often find herself at festivals, hearing the same few composers' music being played. Very soon, we find ourselves talking about George E Lewis and a 2020 article he wrote for The New York Times, titled 'Lifting The Cone Of Silence From Black Composers'.

"George makes the point that there's this myth of absence," says Molleson. "So, because we don't read about a composer, or we haven't heard their music, then they must not have been good enough to be included in the history books."

'Sound Within Sound' is a direct antidote to this falsehood, showing how the 20th century was a turning point, both with regard to who could write music, and what type of music could be written.

"The whole world exploded in the 20th century!" exclaims Molleson, emphatically. "Social revolutions happened, and women, people of colour and others around the world were making radical music. I realised that the stuff I had been taught at university, and the programmed festivals I was going to, didn't recognise what had changed in the 20th century. We were still being fed this story of classical music existing on one trajectory that progresses from birth onwards through a series of great composers. And all of those composers were white men. The more I explored things myself, the more I realised that was bullshit."

One of the most iridescent characters from 'Sound Within Sound' is Else Marie Pade, Denmark's first electronic music composer, whose life reads like a Hollywood script.

From blowing up telephone lines as a teenager during the Nazi occupation of Copenhagen, to being arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Frøslev internment camp, where Pade composed spirit-raising songs for her fellow prisoners, it was a chance encounter with Pierre Schaeffer's emerging musique concrète techniques on a Danish radio broadcast ("alchemising daily life", as Molleson beautifully puts it in the book) that changed her life. For Pade, it was a crystallising moment, the first time she realised it was possible to make the sounds inside her head come true.

"Else got commissioned to make a score for 'The Little Mermaid'," says Molleson. "And she thought, 'I need to make the sound of the mermaid's voice. What does a mermaid sound like? It's not a normal human voice'. So Else had to invent something through electronic manipulation. She wasn't using electronics for the sake of technological novelty – she needed ways to make those sounds in her head come to life."

In her career, Pade went on to work with Schaeffer and Stockhausen, while creating wonderfully imaginative pieces like 1958's 'Symphonie Magnétophonique', a 20-minute sound collage about spending 24 hours in the Danish capital.

A real sense of human curiosity continues throughout the book's 10 chapters, from indigenous Mexican composer Julián Carrillo's theories that microtones let him tap into people's minds, to Filipino ethnomusicologist José Maceda's utopian fantasies of writing epic symphonies using thousands of cars as instruments.

In unearthing these stories, Molleson embarked on a number of field trips. She travels to meet Ethiopian pianist Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou in Jerusalem and influential electronicist Éliane Radigue in Paris, and she evocatively describes watching American composer Muhal Richard Abrams – then aged 86 – perform a few years ago in New York.

"He came from the jazz world in Chicago in the 1960s," says Molleson. "He really fought against definitions in genre. As a black man, playing jazz, it was assumed that he could only play one genre. But he then started using electronics, which was really a statement of self-determination for him, because black people weren't allowed to compose *that* kind of complicated music."

In fact, much of the resistance actually came from the jazz world. As George E Lewis writes, "Abrams' use of electronics proved controversial and widely misunderstood in a world of jazz, in which acoustic instruments became conflated with musical, cultural, and eventually, even racial authenticity".

But Abrams would not be deterred, as his 1968 album 'Levels And Degrees Of Light' demonstrates. Combining drone, spoken-word ululations and a warping electronic soundscape, it morphs into a free jazz

scuffle of truly monumental proportions. As defiance goes, it's a pretty powerful statement.

Abrams' story is important, and throughout her book, Molleson diligently communicates that diversity in the concert hall is not just a quantitative matter – how many black and female players there are, for example – but actually something more qualitative.

"What we need to do is be much more open to all sorts of sound," she reasons. "Abrams makes the point that there's all kinds of black life, so there's going to be all sorts of music, because if your music is true to the life you live, it's going to sound different. So it's about arguing for opening our ears and being a bit more inquisitive about the way we listen.

"I'm hoping the book will spark interest in these figures and will mean that the commissioners, funders, record labels, the people with money and the musicians themselves are more inclined to make those recordings and programme these works into concerts. It's not going to be easy. It's not like you reach for a new score and perform it. You're going to have to do the work and find scores that are not necessarily available, and learn how to play them. This music requires different techniques, different instruments and different playing mentalities."

'Sound Within Sound: Opening Our Ears To The 20th Century' is out now on Faber

HOUSE CALL

Music-themed furnishing solutions

It was really only a matter of time before Scandinavian powerhouses IKEA and supergroup Swedish House Mafia joined forces. Their new Obegränsad ("Unlimited") collection is designed to help you build an affordable home studio, and so far includes a production desk, armchair and IKEA's first turntable since 1973.

"With the Obegränsad collection," state the collaborators in a joint press release, "Swedish House Mafia and IKEA aim to democratise music production at home and enable the many to unleash their passions and creativity."

Satisfyingly chunky but sleek and functional, the stylish all-black collection launches this autumn – with more product additions promised – and is well worth a closer look. **ikea.com**

WEATHER REPORT

Chris Watson and co battle the elements

Do you like eminent field recordist Chris Watson, meteorology and epic sound and visuals? Then head to the Southbank's Queen Elizabeth Hall on 24 September for a unique collaboration between Watson, Spanish filmmaker Carlos Casas and cutting-edge experimentalists Manchester Collective. Together, they'll be performing 'Weather', a 1997 piece written by American composer Michael Gordon, with each of its four movements representing a different natural habitat transformed by extreme weather events. Originally conceived as a video opera for a 16-piece "vertical orchestra" (stacked on scaffolding, if you were wondering), this one-off performance promises to be just as special. Tickets start at £10. **southbankcentre.co.uk**

EVERYTHING COUNTS

Nifty synth repurposes the trusty abacus

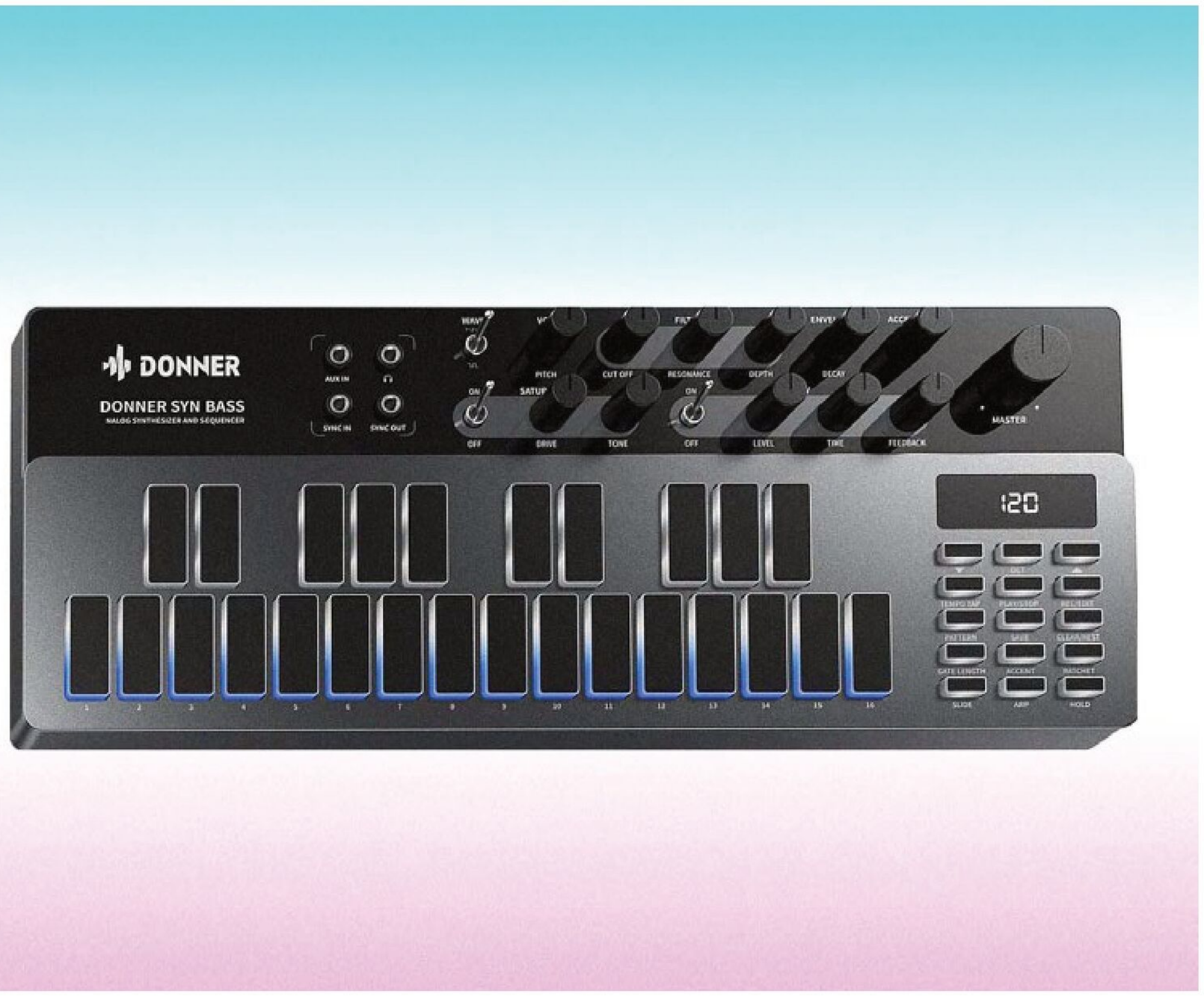
Say hello to the Abacusynth, a fully functional electronic instrument inspired by that ancient counting tool, the abacus. Conceived as part of a thesis by New York University design student Elias Jarzombek, the Abacusynth is comprised of four horizontal rods hosting a selection of different shapes, which are then read by light sensors and moved or spun to manipulate the resulting sound. “The project came from a desire to create a fun interface that would allow anyone to explore synthesis and timbre,” explains Elias. “I took inspiration from an abacus because it provided familiar and flexible interactions that evoke experimentation and discovery.” Are you listening, left-field synth companies? Elias’ DMs are open. **eliasjarzombek.com**

ANALOGUE ACE

Positive debut for affordable synth

Donner, the Chinese budget instrument maker, recently released its first ever analogue synth – and it's a real gem. Inspired by the Roland TB-303's acid-like/bassy sounds, the entry-level B1 synth and sequencer features two waveform options (sawtooth and square), built-in distortion/saturation and even a switch-controlled tape delay effect. Billed by Donner as a "beginner-friendly synthesiser interface", the B1's intuitive and tactile design includes a backlit silicone keyboard and 128 sequence presets. Best of all, it'll only set you back £169. If the expense has stopped you from buying an analogue synth before, then the Donner B1 may be just the ticket.

donnerdeal.com



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The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save UK recordings from extinction. **Andy Linehan**, curator of Popular Music, digs through some of the archive's priceless audio treasures. This month: **Terry Day**

Terry Day is a spontaneous composer and improvising musician who was born in 1940 and brought up in Dagenham in east London. His father was a drummer as were his two elder brothers, and there was always a drum kit in the house. Inevitably, Day took up the drums and as a teenager began playing in dance bands at local weddings and social events.

Day inherited his brother Pat's interest in jazz. Pat, who was playing live with Graham Bond, encouraged him to express himself and to explore different rhythms and textures.

Terry met fellow students Russell Hardy and Terry Harman (who played piano and bass respectively) at Dagenham Art School, and they formed a trio, who played regularly for the next four years without making any public appearances. During this period, Day moved to Walthamstow School of Art where he met Ian Dury. The pair progressed to the Royal College of Art and began sharing a flat. (Hardy and Day would later be part of Dury's first group, Kilburn And The High Roads.)

In the mid-1960s, Day's trio started to appear in public at a series of events at The Starting Gate in Wood Green where four or five bands would play on the same night, often swapping personnel and instruments. Poets and painters also took part, and the loose grouping became known as the Continuous Music Ensemble and subsequently The People Band, appearing regularly in the late 1960s at venues such as the Arts Lab in Drury Lane. They recorded one LP, which was produced by Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts, and continued in one form or another for nearly a decade.

Terry Day's improvisation skills were widely admired in Europe where he spent many years touring after the demise of The People Band. Throughout his career, he linked up with many fellow improvisers including Derek Bailey, Steve Beresford, David Toop and Lol Coxhill.

From 1987 to 2000, poor health meant that Day was unable to participate in any musical activity, but he recovered and began performing again with the London Improvisers Orchestra and other groups, and he is still performing today. A collection of his archive of recordings has been digitised for the British Library's Save Our Sounds project, and an interview with him is available on the British Library Sounds website.

For more about Save Our Sounds visit bl.uk/save-our-sounds

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Following the release of 'What Do The Stars Say To You' – a collaborative album under his WARM moniker – Chicago house legend **Ron Trent** opens up about his formative influences

INTERVIEW: ROBERT HARRIS

MIAMI VICE

"The TV show 'Miami Vice' was shot like a movie – heavily stylised. It was high fashion and high art. I think it was Don Johnson who said that it was like an MTV cop show. Everything looked like a music video. Jan Hammer did the score, but they also used a lot of the new music that was coming out at the time. It was very hip and edgy.

"I look at that and think about the music content, the architecture, the buildings, the water – it's this vision of an urban paradise. I wanted to be an architect when I was younger. I started studying in high school, but the music just kind of took over. There were new synthesisers, tools and technology in the studios for creating a new world of music. What I do now is sonic architecture – building with sound."

PRYOR ENGAGEMENT

"At one time, comedian Richard Pryor was the tone-setter. I don't recall a moment growing up, where he wasn't present. He was highly influential in terms of how Americans, especially African Americans, looked at things, and he humourised our experiences and pain. He changed the way people thought.

"I'm sure he had his influences too – Redd Foxx, Dick Gregory or Moms Mabley – but he totally took the thing and flipped it. Comedy allows you to look at the world differently, and let off some steam."

CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

"My father and I had very deep conversations. I've always been into philosophy. When I think back now, it's like, 'Damn, I was talking about that shit, and I was only seven or eight!'.

"As a kid, I was really big into archaeology and history. Before I wanted to be an architect, I wanted to be an archaeologist. And I was really curious about history, in particular Kemetic history, pyramids and artefacts. I wasn't a strange kid, it was just really interesting to me, this big world."

THE BEAT GOES ON

"The conga drum was the first instrument I was introduced to as a child. My father was a percussionist. He studied at the University of Massachusetts, and one of his professors was the jazz drummer Max Roach. My father had a band, and he would also play with Max from time to time. So I grew up studying rhythm, and rhythm is why I got involved in DJing.

"As I developed my skill, it became about music being matched, beat-wise, but also about melodies and being able to tell a story. My father was a DJ too. He would bring records home, and we'd listen to stuff together and play along on percussion and drums. I got a lot of ear training out of that. The drum is actually one of the original methods of communication – a sacred thing."

RIO VIBES

"It was 2010, and I was in London on my birthday. I got a chance to see my favourite band in the world, Azymuth, live at the Jazz Cafe. It was everything. The great José Roberto Bertrami… one of my biggest inspirations in terms of keyboard players. It was the first and last time, unfortunately, that I saw him perform. That concert was like, 'Wow!'. They were playing all the classics – 'Jazz Carnival', yeah! – but the tune of the night was 'Last Summer In Rio'. Those chords, man, that groove!

"I got into Azymuth back in 1984. I started playing records and DJing in 1982, but I'd begun collecting as a kid, around 1979. My father ran the record pool, so we had access to music that other people didn't have through that, but we would still go to stores to buy stuff. I bought everything by Herb Alpert, Spyro Gyra… when I was a kid I was into jazz and fusion – that's what everybody called it back then. Azymuth fell right into that.

"I like groups, musicians and producers who can paint pictures when they play. You'd listen to 'Last Summer In Rio' and be like, 'Is that what Rio sounds like? Shit, I want to be there now!'. I've seen a lot of folks coming up – The Jackson 5, Eddie Palmieri, Fela Kuti – but for me,that concert was just, 'Yes!'."

ALL THAT JAZZ

"As far as musicians go, two guys I admire so much are Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie – I have both of their pictures in my studio. I love Dizzy not just because he represented bebop and everything, but because he was such a character and so innovative. He was really interested in his roots – stuff like 'A Night In Tunisia', where he was exploring Afro/Cuban rhythms.

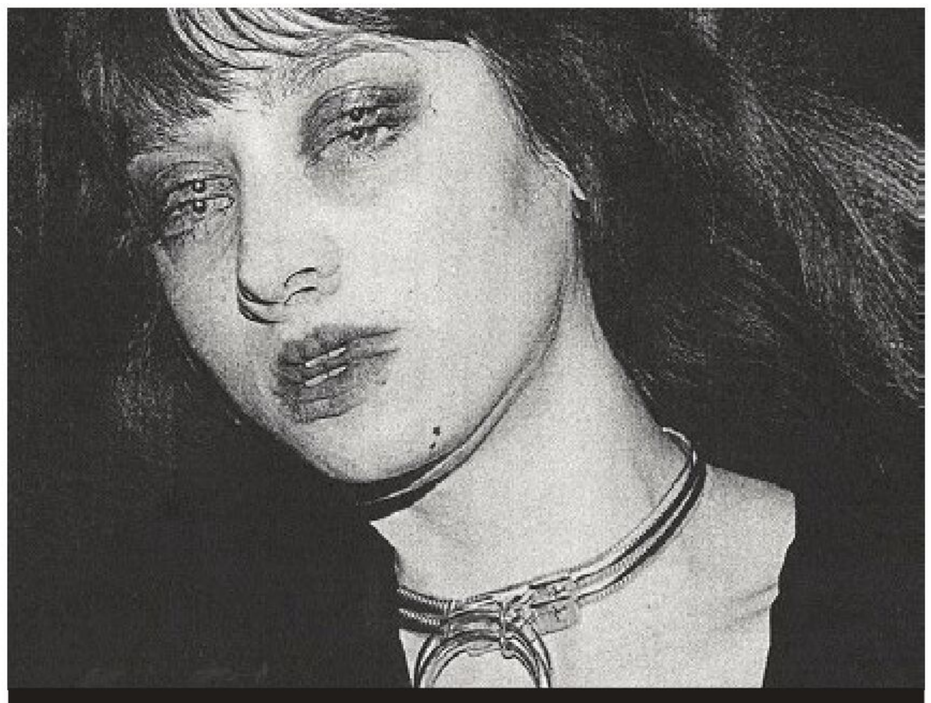
"And Miles was constantly fusing things, challenging people, breaking that ceiling. When I saw his paintings, I was like, 'Yeah, now I really get it'. These guys obviously had a certain aesthetic – colours, sounds – that when put together had real power. When you look at how Dizzy and Miles approached music, you can see what palettes they were working from. With Miles, you can tell he was reaching for the gods."

FEELS SURREAL

"An artist who has highly influenced my own palette, if you will, is Salvador Dalí. His use of colour, symbolism, surrealism… José Bertrami was also into surrealism – the art and the approach. When I knew that, it explained why I was attracted to his music because he creates these surreal pictures with his chords. There are only a few people who can do that, lay a chord bed that creates these other worlds.

"Dali has that visual power to create other worlds too. I know that later he experimented, creating on LSD and speed, but he naturally had access to such colours, totally unique at the time he was doing it. A different way of thinking, breaking boundaries, trying new things, fusion – that's where high art happens."

WARM's 'What Do The Stars Say To You' is out now on Night Time Stories



PULSE

DRIFT.

Industrial technoist hits the catwalk

WHO THEY?

DRIFT. is British-Italian producer Nathalie Bruno, who's been releasing music under that name since 2015. After the intense techno-pop of her 'Black Devotion' and 'Genderland' EPs on Italian label Avant!, she released her debut album, 'Symbiosis', in 2020 on Hamburg's Tapete label, which was a decidedly more left-field affair. Earlier this year, Bruno released 'The Nature Of Things', consisting of a 30-minute piece entitled 'CTRL//Algorhythm Of Love' written for designer Mona Cordes' 'Cellusion' show at this year's London Fashion Week. Bruno also works as a model herself.

WHY DRIFT.?

'Symbiosis' is an enthralling assemblage of hard-edged, lo-fi futurism, channelling both the industrial electronica of Chris & Cosey and the haunted melodics of Broadcast, with Bruno's voice darkly hypnotic throughout. 'CTRL// Algorhythm Of Love' is something else entirely – a journey into the dark heart of the dancefloor. The glimmering, bass-heavy trance of its opening section could be classic Underworld, while its ambient centre is genuinely Eno-esque. And then it all kicks off again as a Berlin School-style banger. It's terrific. "When I began creating the music for the show, I initially thought it would be for a traditional catwalk," says Bruno. "It wasn't until Mona asked for more ambience that I understood it would be an improvised dance performance. Doing sound for fashion or film has always been a dream of mine."

TELL US MORE...

Bruno is in the process of completing two more records, both different from what's gone before. "One will be European-sounding, I guess – lots of drum machines, electronics and a few tracks sung in French and Russian," she says. "The other is sparser and more textural – otherworldly songs with hardly any drums." But Bruno is in no rush to release them. "All I can say is that my music is constantly evolving, reflecting my own evolution and life experiences."

JOE BANKS

'The Nature Of Things' is out now on Bandcamp

THE NEW SCHOOL

Can DIY modular synthesis create a society of scientists? Electronics whizz **Moritz Klein** and **Girts Ozoliņš** of Erica Synths certainly think so...

WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES

Electronics educator Moritz Klein remembers tinkering on a Korg MS-20 synthesiser for the first time, shortly after moving to Berlin in his late 20s.

"I was like, 'I have no idea what this is. This is amazing – black magic that I can't ever understand'. But once I figured out that an oscillator isn't really that complicated, even one that is voltage-controlled, I realised that it's very much doable."

By "doable", of course, Klein means "makeable".

"I just really love engineering," he says. "I really like coming up with the circuit. But it can be very hard to decipher if you're not an engineering student. That contributed to me feeling that working with synthesisers is very walled-off. I just wanted to break that down to show people, 'Hey, you can probably pick this up. It's not rocket science!'."

It was this drive that led him into the sanctum of revered Latvian developer Erica Synths, after founder Ģirts Ozoliņš discovered Klein's work through the latter's YouTube channel.

Now the products they have collaborated on are finally out in the world, under the name mki x es.EDU, a series of nine DIY Eurorack modules designed to educate and inspire their builders. Together, these will constitute a fully modular synth with all the functionality you'd expect – an oscillator, filter and sequencer. Even the case and power supply arrive in kit form.

"I'm so happy we met Moritz and we made it happen together," says Ozoliņš. "We started this because most DIY kits you can buy are very closed-ended. You build some blinking LED Christmas tree, and that's it, there is no other use to it. What we wanted to do is provide educational kits, which can be used afterwards with real-life applications. I've had several requests from after-school clubs in Latvia, where kids could do electronics and soldering, and then a music class, where students can take the thing over and actually play music with it. So that was the initial intention, aside from the instructional element – after you have built the thing, you can actually use it!"

The pair kindly sent me one of the mki x es.EDU modules – the recently released EG – ahead of our interview. Envelope generators are simple, functional modules that govern the movement of a voltage signal over time, but these kits don't just shine in their physical form. Klein has written extensive literature to accompany each module, so even without the modules themselves, mki x es.EDU is bearing fruit as a long-term educational resource. Hand-drawn illustrations accompany step-by-step explanations of components and circuits, complete with suggested schematics for first-testing fundamental circuits on a breadboard (a solderless surface allowing circuits to be built while interchanging components) if you so choose.

"I really want to encourage people to use a breadboard," says Klein. "Ideally, it would lead you to questions like, 'How do these parts connect?' and 'Why do we connect these components there?'."

As Ozoliņš explains, well-devised educational resources like mki x es.EDU are not just fun – they're an essential investment.

"In the EU, there was a recent statistic that at the moment we're lacking 30,000 engineers," he says. "Right now we're just scratching the surface. We haven't yet really focused on education at Erica, but it's the primary intention of this project – to get more engineers out there."

In the same way that mki x es.EDU's output is not bound to its physical products, its vision is by no means limited to this initial series of modules and literature.

"Once all the kits are in place," says Ozoliņš, "Moritz will probably develop some other interesting circuits. Then we will start to really get out there with this educational programme."

The mki x es.EDU series is available to order from ericasynths.lv

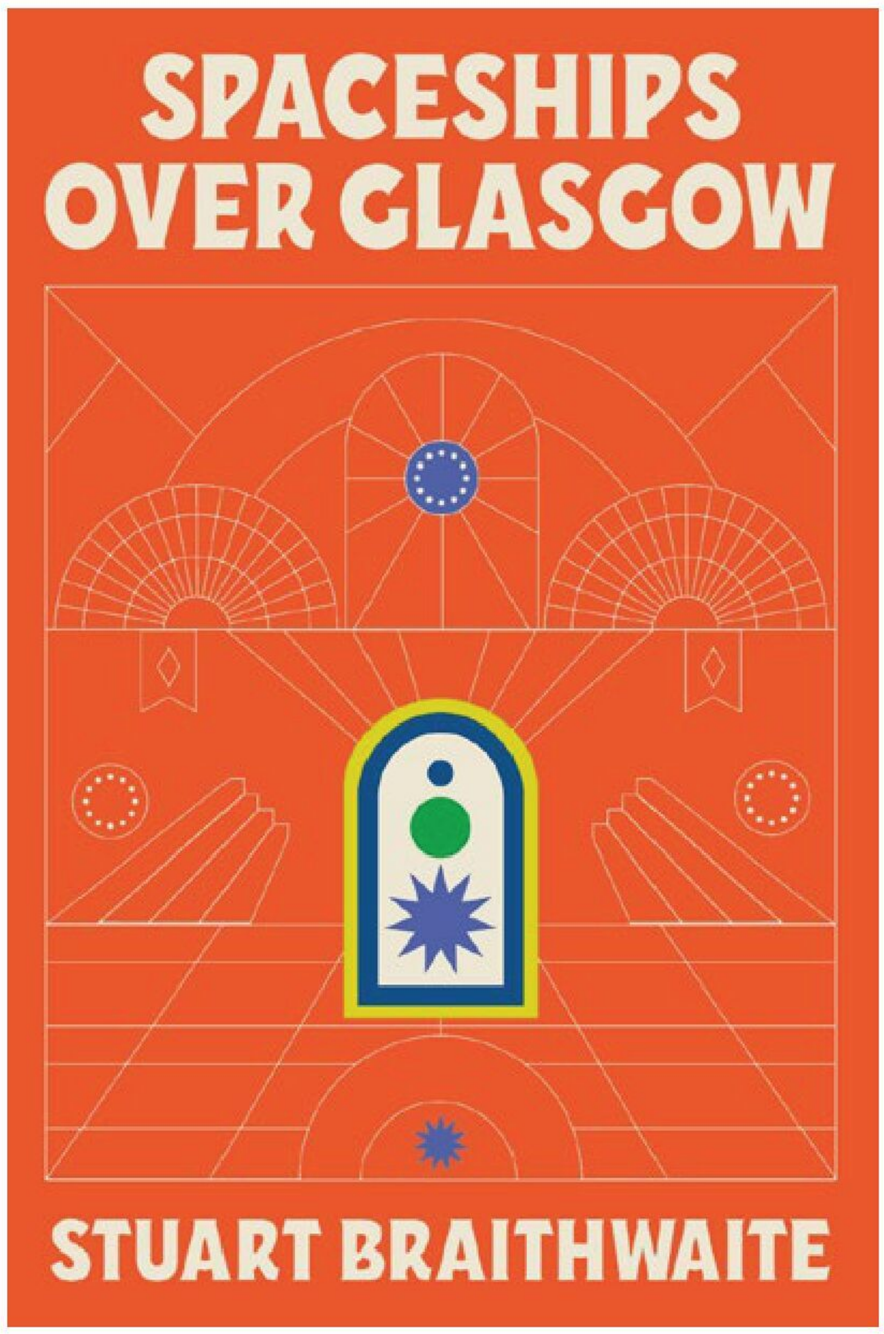
GIRTS OZOLIŅŠ - PHOTO: MARKOVSKIS

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

Mogwai man writes of his “misspent youth”

Mogwai’s Stuart Braithwaite is the latest member of the UK post-rock fraternity to pen a memoir, and what a jolly good read it is too. ‘Spaceships Over Glasgow: Mogwai And Misspent Youth’ documents the Glasgow-born guitarist’s salad days, from spending time in thrall to alternative bands like Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine, to his nearly three decades making monumental noise with Mogwai.

Braithwaite says the book is about “teenage idiocy, life in general, gigs and playing in Mogwai”, while White Rabbit Books’ Lee Brackstone calls it “a funny and righteous celebration of a life lived on the road and in the studio, dedicated to the pursuit of aural (and occasionally) psychic enlightenment and obliteration”. Either way, it’s fabulous – preorder a hardback copy now for £20. **whiterabbitbooks.co.uk**



PEACE PLAN

‘Artists For Peace’ is a wonderful new 24-track digital compilation album from Dublin’s Farpoint Recordings, made in response to the Ukraine invasion. Featuring a host of Irish composers, from The Quiet Club to Karen Power, the record also draws in several international names, including David Toop, Christina Kubisch and Viv Corringham, with works including orchestral pieces, spoken word, improvisations, sound art and much more. It is accompanied by a 32-page digital booklet, providing information on tracks, artist bios, and a short essay on peace by curator Seán McCrum. You can buy a copy for just €10, with all proceeds going to UNICEF and the Irish Red Cross. **farpointrecordings.com**

LANDMARKS

Anne Dudley recalls the making of **The Art Of Noise**’s hugely influential 1985 hit **‘Close (To The Edit)’**

INTERVIEW: IAN BERRIMAN

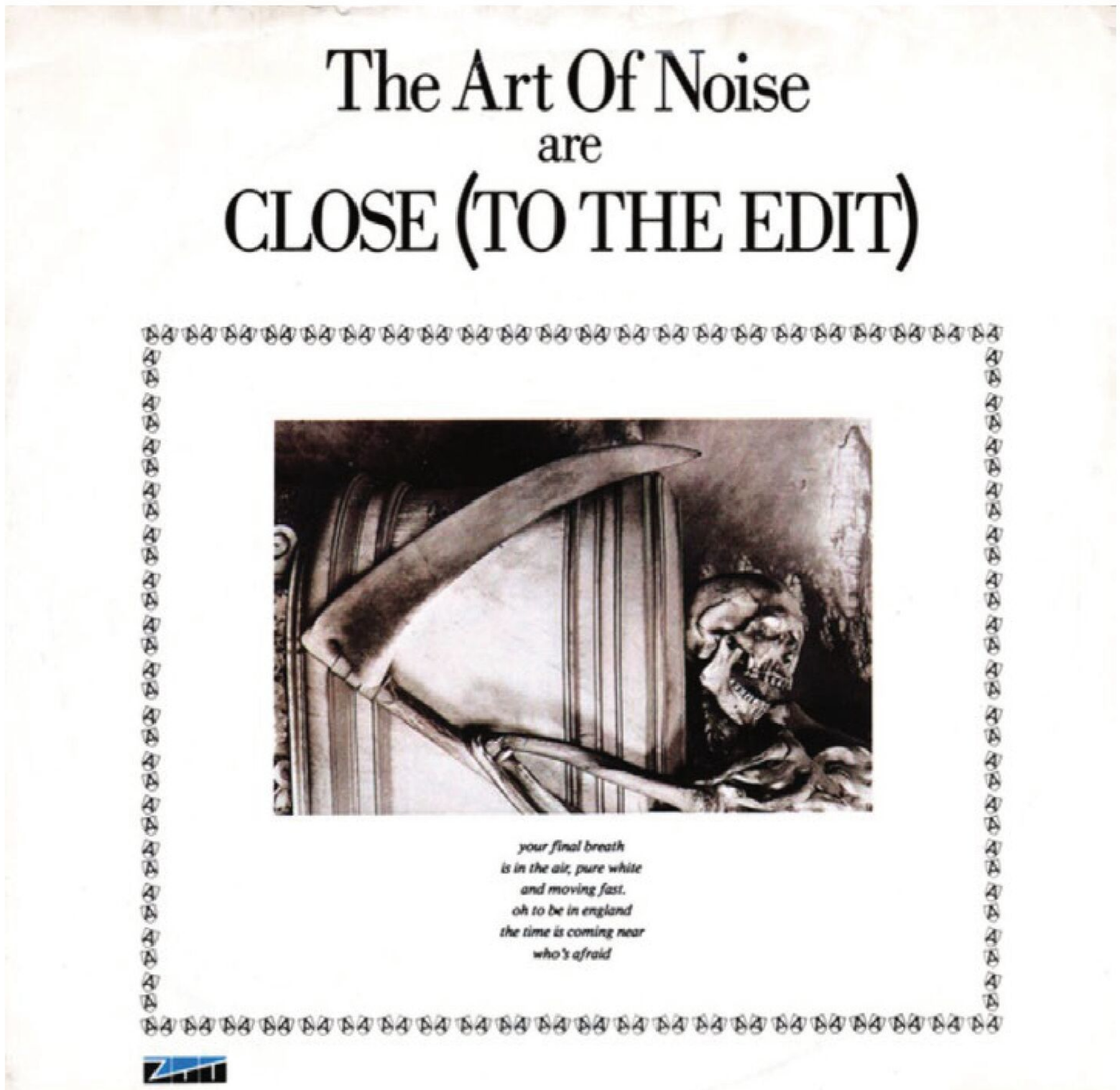
“We all first met each other when we were working with Trevor Horn on a Dollar record he was producing. He’d just acquired the Fairlight, and JJ Jeczalik had taken it upon himself to learn how to program this thing. It was a bit of a beast – you had to really work to input the samples. So JJ was doing that, and Gary Langan was engineering. Then we became the Trevor Horn team and worked on ABC’s ‘The Lexicon Of Love’.

“We’d sampled Thereza Bazar’s voice for Dollar and Martin Fry for a couple of things in ‘The Lexicon Of Love’, and we found it a very interesting way of working. In a way, we were doing the same things experimental composers did in the 1950s, but they had to do it all with analogue tape, and it was laborious. It was exciting to find this new sound world, where potentially any noise could attain some sort of musical credibility just by changing the pitch.

“Trevor had just started the label, ZTT, under the auspices of Island Records. JJ, Gary and I had been messing about with a few things, and Chris Blackwell, who ran Island, got to hear it and he said, ‘You should release some records’.

“None of us really wanted to join a group, but hey-ho, we did. Then Paul Morley, who was involved in ZTT on the design and concept side, came up with the name, and it all sort of made sense. He said, ‘Okay, we’ll call ourselves The Art Of Noise. It doesn’t sound like a group, it sounds more like an avant-garde movement’.

“Generally, I did the musical things – played the actual keyboard – JJ did the programming and Gary did the engineering. But sometimes the roles got more fluid. Trevor would come in and give an overview, and get involved in the editing. We’d often end up with 12 minutes of mad improvisations, which Trevor would then edit down to one minute and say, ‘Let’s develop this bit’. There was a lot of tape on the floor.



"Hip hop was the thing at the time. Gary was working on the Yes album '90125', and he sampled some of the drums and looped it – and that's quite legit, we did pay Alan White for the session. I think there are some other elements in the drum track, but I can't remember where they came from. It's funny, because JJ managed to loop it around the wrong way, with the off-beat on one – it's usually one, two, one, two, but he managed to have it as two, one, two, one.

"Then we thought, 'Well, let's build up a track'. It was very improvised. We sampled in a bit of double bass, which I think Trevor played, but we didn't know quite where to go from there. Then Gary, who never plays the keyboards, played this boogie-woogie 12-bar thing, all out of time, with lots of weird notes in it. When it got quantised and put into the sequencer, it became the bassline.

"Next it was, 'What should we put on that? Let's have a bit of a car starting. Let's play it starting in different pitches'. It was a real car, a Volkswagen – I think it was JJ's. We had Gary and JJ saying 'Money' backwards – which becomes 'Enom'. It was pretty easy to flip it around on the Fairlight.

"JJ was going out with a teacher at the time, and she taught a couple of girls who were interested in coming to the studio. They were probably only about 14, so they had these really nice young voices. We got them to say a few things like, 'Hey!'. 'To be in England / In the summertime / With my love' is the lovely Karen Clayton, who was the receptionist at Sarm Studios at the time.

"The chords are mostly just C and F. The structure of an instrumental can be anything you want, so we set Trevor the task of listening to the Yes track, 'Close To The Edge,' to look at how the bits of melody relate to each other. He came back with this sheet of musical analysis as to how it was constructed.

"We thought, 'OK, we'll do that – we'll have an opening section, then a B-section, then repeat the opening section…'. We didn't follow their composition very closely after a while, but it gave us a starting point, and that's how the title came about.

"The Fairlight had many limitations in its early years. The length of the sample you could do was incredibly short – I think it was barely more than a second. It's to Gary's great credit that he made it sound anything other than dreadful, because the top on all the sounds would disappear. But Gary was a real geek. There was a rack of effects machines, and he'd have them all going to get something that sounded halfway decent.

"As samplers got more shiny, something gritty went out of it. We had to work very hard to make it sound good, and I think that enhanced the creativity. In the mid-80s, people were trying to make the best-sounding records ever. Then ours came out sounding strange, as if from another era, which I think gave it character.

"When I occasionally hear it, it leaps out of the radio at me. It still has a very original sound, and a lovely spirit – it's very cheerful, and a bit silly. Humour in music is a rare commodity, and we weren't afraid to do something completely incongruous and just have fun.

"Looking back, I admire the originality and experimentalism of it. You can do that in your 20s, when you feel fearless. There's no weight of responsibility. It might be good, it might be bad, but it doesn't matter really. You can never regain that in a creative life because, as time goes on, you have all that past. We didn't have any past. We were all *now*."

Anne Dudley's new album of instrumentals, 'Crossing The Bar', is out now on Absolute

KEY TO SUCCESS

Unlock your creativity with Akai's new flagship synth

After considerable rumouring, Akai have finally unveiled their colossal "sampling production synthesiser", the MPC Key 61. With a 61-key semi-weighted keyboard, 16-velocity- and pressure-sensitive pads, a seven-inch colour touchscreen and built-in mic preamps, it also features 25 instrument plug-ins, over 6,000 cutting-edge presets, dynamic responsive control and even onboard emulations of the vintage MPC60 and MPC3000. Phew.

With its "a new dimension of sound", product manager Dan Gill says that the "MPC Key 61 equips every music maker from any genre with a diverse palette of inspirational tools". Promising "unprecedented" creative interaction and compelling workflow, it's yours for £1,699. **akaipro.com**

PEAK PERFORMANCE

Dream artist residencies in the Pyrenees

Brought to you by the team behind Bradford's Fuse Art Space cultural hub, CAMP is a programme of "next-level arts residencies" for musicians, artists and… well, anyone looking to expand their creative practice. Located in the picturesque French thermal village of Aulus-les-Bains, they offer a diverse programme of courses, each run by masters in their respective fields. Study deep listening with Hans-Joachim Roedelius, go field recording with Chris Watson, or try "hearing the impossible" with Matthew Herbert. Such life-changing experiences aren't cheap – we're talking over £1,000 – but funding is available. Several courses have now sold out, but you can subscribe to their newsletter to hear about 2023 dates. **campfr.com**

SISTER ACT

Essential reading from Cosey Fanni Tutti

'Re-Sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire, Margery Kempe And Cosey Fanni Tutti' is the latter's revelatory exploration into the overlapping lives of three visionary artists. Cosey says inspiration for the book came while composing the score for 2020's Delia documentary, 'The Myths And The Legendary Tapes', during which she was also reading a book about Margery Kempe, a 15th-century mystic. To her surprise, Cosey discovered uncanny parallels between herself and the two women, with all three consumed by their passion for life, expressed through music, art and lifestyle. Published by Faber this month, 'Re-Sisters' is available to order for £18.99. There's a special limited hardback edition too, with a snazzy pewter brooch and 60-minute audio tape of music, for £150. **faber.co.uk**

HEAR COME THE WARM JETS

Warming planet makes oceans noisier

A new study has found that climate change is having an unexpected side effect – and it's an audible one. Researchers at Newfoundland's Memorial University in Canada, used two acoustic "hotspots" in the Greenland Sea and Atlantic Ocean to show how our warming waters are creating sound waves that propagate – a term which refers to the transmission of acoustic energy through a medium – faster and last longer before dying away. This is a problem due to the wealth of marine life that relies on sound to communicate and navigate, meaning feeding, mating and migrating habits will be affected. Researchers will now try to "pinpoint areas of combined stressors". **agu.org**

PULSE

HOLLAND ANDREWS

Gifted artist leaves no stone unturned

WHO THEY?

Holland Andrews is a New York vocalist and performance artist who creates abstract, elegant soundscapes tackling themes of repression and catharsis. Alongside their body of solo work, Andrews has composed music for film, theatre and dance, and has undertaken notable collaborations with performers such as Peter Broderick and Son Lux. While they have previously released music under the alias Like A Villain, it is arguably under their own name that Andrews produces their most sensitive and affecting work.

WHY HOLLAND ANDREWS?

Many of Andrews' compositions are based around their intriguing vocal style, which is openly influenced by jazz, opera and musical theatre (a hangover from the theatre camps they attended as a child). The combination of these diverse musical leanings and Andrews' difficult teenage years – they were 16 when their mother committed suicide – is what makes their voice so unique, in that they have the ability to effortlessly follow dissonance with a calming sense of release and tranquility. You will likely find a sense of exorcism within Andrews' work, even if avant-garde soundscapes don't usually make up a large chunk of your daily listening.

TELL US MORE...

Andrews' latest EP, 'Forgettings', builds on the foundations of the artist's earlier solo work, but possesses a richer intensity than their previous releases. The opening track, 'Transform Forever', is particularly representative of this, weaving from one extreme to another within the space of three-and-a-half minutes. Oregon Public Broadcasting described one of Andrews' performances as "the channeling of deep reserves of light and darkness, for the benefit of audiences battered by emotional trauma". Andrews will be playing at the historic Musikbrauerei in Berlin on 8 October – a must-see, by all accounts.

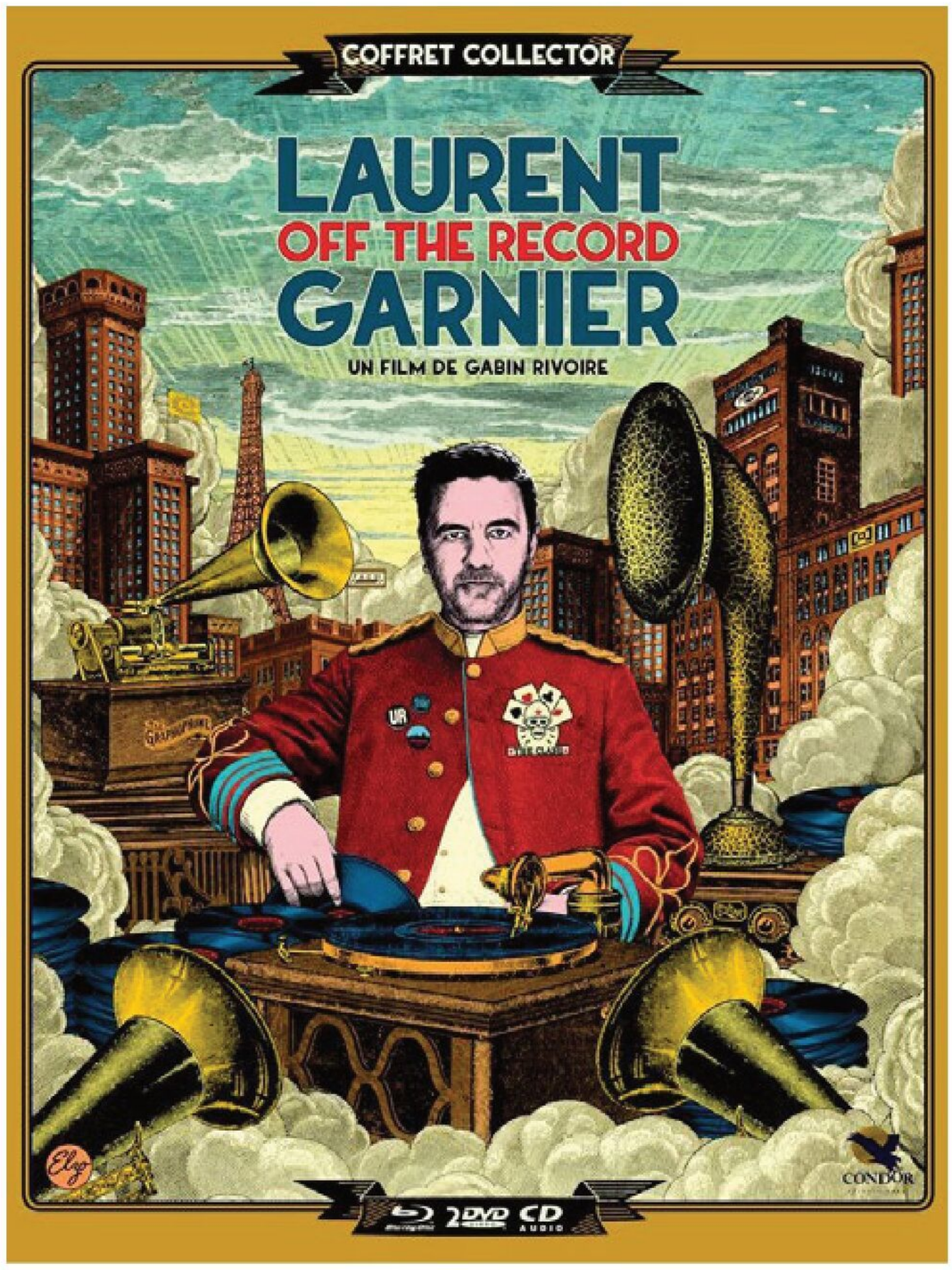
IMOGEN BEBB

'Forgettings' is out now on LEITER

GARNIERING SUPPORT

Legendary jock gets his long-awaited doc

French DJ and producer Laurent Garnier is a pivotal yet arguably undervalued figure in the history of dance music, though a new documentary by director Gabin Rivoire should rectify that. Released in the UK last month, 'Laurent Garnier: Off The Record' explores the rise of techno through Garnier's own eyes, chronicling his early days playing at the Haçienda as DJ Pedro, residencies at Ministry and The End in London, and the mythical Wake Up! parties at the Rex Club in Paris. The F Communications label co-founder recalls his life story with good humour, while techno royalty such as Carl Cox and Richie Hawtin pay their dues. See if it's coming to a screen near you. **instagram.com/laurentgarnieroffttherecord**



MOTOR CITY BEATS

Detroit techno film incoming

Some 12 years in the making, the 'God Said Give 'Em Drum Machines' documentary is finally set for a UK release after premiering at Tribeca Film Festival in June. Providing a fresh perspective on the birth of Detroit techno, key figures such as Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson narrate compelling first-hand tales of technological innovation, key nights and inspirational friendships, both of which were pivotal to turning the genre into the global music phenomenon that it is today.

"Documenting the global techno scene has given us the context we need to accurately present Detroit's influence on popular music, and its overlooked musical contributions to music history, black history and American history," says producer Jennifer Washington. Head to the film's official website for updates on upcoming screenings. **detroittechnomovie.com**

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** gets all 1960s with the very scarce **Mellotron demonstration disc**

This seven-inch is a real bit of history about a great piece of kit that was used by so many different bands. It's the holy grail of equipment demo discs. It's not online. It's not on YouTube. It's nowhere. There's no sleeve, and not very much information on the label, just the address – Mellotronics, 28-30 Market Place, London W1 – and the marketing phrase, "A New World Of Music At Your Fingertips". My copy has a Mecolico sticker on it. Mecolico was the Mechanical Copyright Licences Company, a precursor to MCPS.

The narration is typically hilarious, and the record shows off how easy it is to make music with a Mellotron using just one finger. It's a very cheesy demonstration indeed. The Mellotron's target market were non-musicians looking for a home system to have fun with. I don't think it really took off until bands started using it and exploiting its full potential.

The Beatles are the most famous Mellotron adopters, with 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. Lennon bought one in 1965, but for 'Strawberry Fields' they used the one at Abbey Road, and McCartney played the intro part. I actually played Lennon's Mellotron back in 1993, as Trent Reznor had it at that house where Sharon Tate was murdered. You can tell the difference because Lennon's had this very weird, harsh action. The keys are giant wooden things, and the action is really deep, so you have to push down extremely hard to make it work properly. It's very difficult to play anything fast on. I don't know if Reznor actually owned it or not, but there it was, with the flute patch!

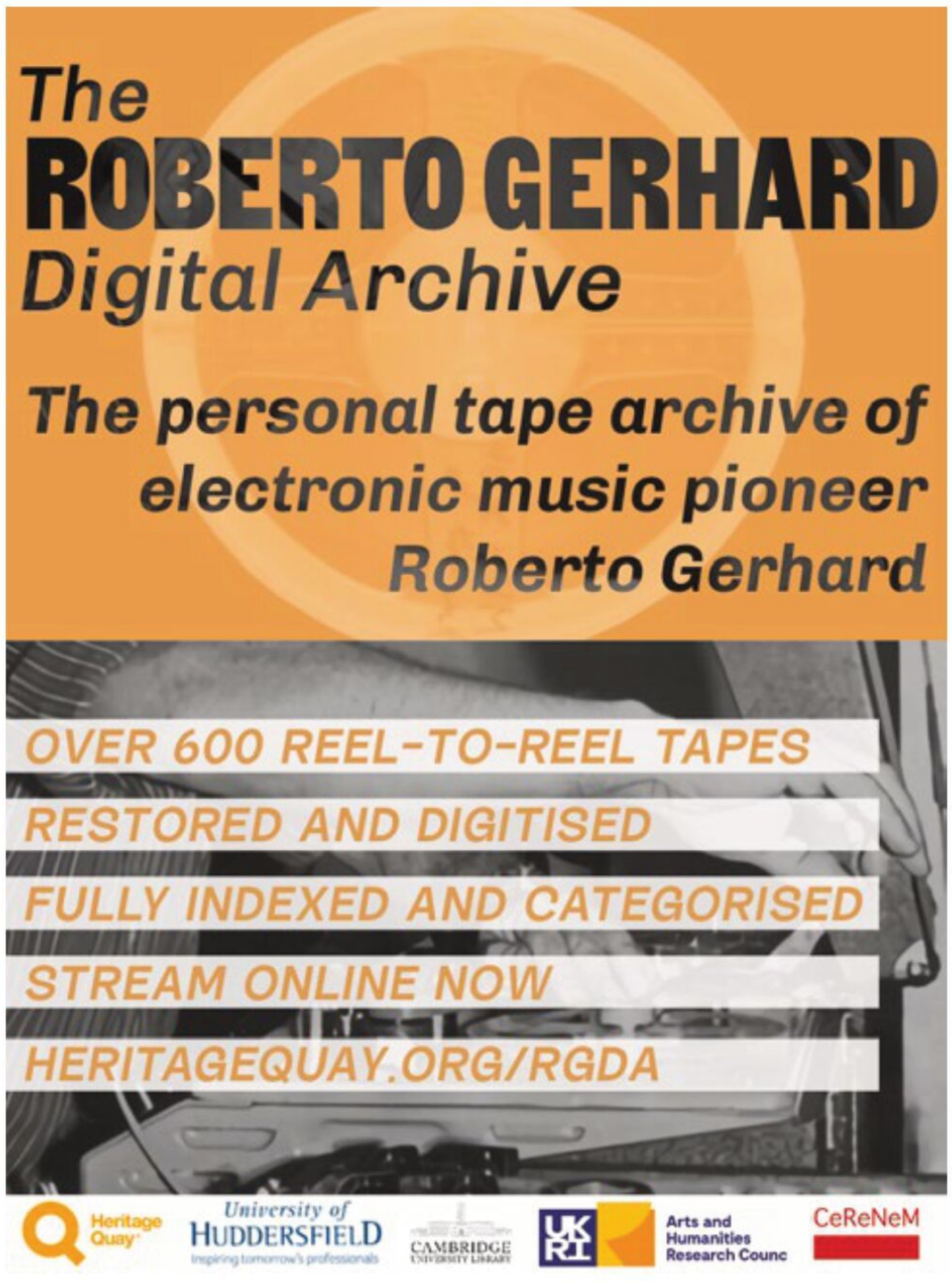
The new digital Mellotrons are great. The company has the rights to all the custom sounds that were created for people like Roxy Music, Tangerine Dream and Yes. The bands would send recordings they wanted on their Mellotron to the factory in Streetly, Birmingham, and the engineers would put them on tapes in a loom to go into the Mellotron. So there are all these sound effects, famous little lines from 'Rubycon' where they were using a Synthi AKS but needed access to different sounds straight away. They were using it as a sampler, which is essentially what the Mellotron was.

I've never seen another copy of the demo disc anywhere, so I have no idea how much it might be worth, but as a little slice of electronic music history, it's priceless.

rolling like a bullet
the new LP by andrew ostler

"a work of great subtlety and focus -
alternating sections of drone and gentle synth pulses,
but always developing, always moving forward"

expertsleepersltd.bandcamp.com



PULSE

AKUSMI

Marvellous gamelan-infused maximalism

WHO THEY?

Pascal Bideau is a French, London-based neoclassical composer and multi-instrumentalist who has made music for companies like Hyundai and Dior and – perhaps more improbably – for a documentary about Manchester United, 'The Class Of '92'. Following a trip to Indonesia, Bideau became absorbed in gamelan music, a rhythm that so obsessed him, he set about creating a whole project based on its alacritous percussive dimensions.

WHY AKUSMI?

Akusmi is Bideau's chosen alias for 'Fleeting Future', his debut album, which is also the first release on Tonal Union, the new label from Adam Heron (formerly of Erased Tapes and Gondwana Records). It's a vivacious inaugural release, mixing gamelan with repetitive, Steve Reich-like ostinatos that burst into maximalist electronic cascades, accompanied by skronking blasts of jazzy wind instrumentation. Upbeat, curious and full of enthusiasm for what hasn't yet happened, the motivations behind 'Fleeting Future' are certainly more welcome than all those dark takes about impending doom for the planet. "The future is fascinating," says Bideau. "It is constantly readjusting to new events. I feel we left a linear approach to the future to enter an arborescent one, where all the data and information we have about what could happen is exponentially ever-growing." So there you have it.

TELL US MORE...

The energy is infectious throughout, with each track developing in ways that sound at once haphazard and precise. The title track transmutes into an aural dreamscape of celestial loveliness, while 'Divine Moments Of Beauty' is less obvious, bridging the jazz age with the information age in a cosmic melange. 'Neo Tokyo' ramps up the dissonance, making for a ride that's both punishing and thrilling, like a Pandora's box unleashing hundreds of sounds from the Fourth World all at once. 'Fleeting Future' teems with the unexpected, just like the future itself.

JEREMY ALLEN

'Fleeting Future' is out now on Tonal Union

RISE OF THE INKIES

All aboard the music press rollercoaster

The rise and, er, *fall* of the music press? Whatever your feelings on that matter, 'Totally Wired: The Rise And Fall Of The Music Press' is a new book by esteemed writer Paul Gorman, detailing the evolution of the music press on both sides of the Atlantic.

Over 400 pages, Gorman looks back at key rock and pop writers, from Greil Marcus to Charles Shaar Murray, and publications such as NME, Melody Maker and Sounds, which all defined the way we digested music culture in the 20th century. Covering the 1950s to the 2000s, it's an illuminating treatise on rock 'n' roll, glam, punk, pop, hip hop and more, as Gorman expertly combines first-hand interviews with his own insight from inside the trenches to paint a vivid portrait. Much like Gorman's recent biography of Malcolm McLaren, this is essential reading. Pre-order the hardback now for £25. **thamesandhudson.com**

DIFFERENT CLASS

Sound exploration for all ages

School Of Noise is an intriguing initiative, designed to spark creativity and scientific exploration through music and the medium of sound via online and offline workshops for all ages – right down to babies and toddlers.

"I began the School Of Noise with my brother Jacob back in 2015, after watching a film about the work of Brian Dennis and the Shoreditch Experimental Music School," says co-founder Dan Mayfield. "Our aim was to create fun and educational workshops exploring the world of music and the science of sound."

Along with the Mayfield brothers, other workshop leaders include Happy Robots' Alice Hubley, and Mark Williamson who has been releasing music as Spaceship since the 1990s.

"I love that there is always something new to discover about the many roles sound plays in our lives," explains Mayfield. "The School Of Noise has since gone on to deliver workshops and talks around the world, working with people of all ages."

Jarvis Cocker is also a fan, having declared School Of Noise "one of those ideas that you just *know* is right". We concur. See if there's a workshop happening near you. **schoolofnoise.com**

TIME MACHINE

Talk Talk's **Mark Hollis** famously retreated from the limelight long before his untimely passing in 2019. But a recently unearthed mixtape given to producer Gareth Jones reveals the early musical influences behind this most reclusive of artists

WORDS: WILLIAM STOKES

It's a rare and special thing to uncover a previously unseen musical artefact. Even a minor one, like the love letter written by Jerry Garcia to a Vogue cover model in 1982, can be exciting, shedding new light on a figure's life or work. Safe to say it's even more so when the life of that person is decidedly oblique. Such is the case with Mark Hollis.

When he died in 2019, it's said there was a scramble to find enough information about the Talk Talk frontman to write his obituary. So when my friend, producer Gareth Jones, mentioned that he still had a mixtape Hollis had made for him, my ears naturally pricked up. A few months later, we're at his east London studio to listen to the tape.

"Such tiny handwriting," murmurs Jones, looking closely at it. "Two songs to a line, some of them. 'The Mark Hollis Selection' is my title – his is just 'Various'! That's my inlay. I loved the fact that you could put a picture in such a nice little frame.

"When Mark died, obviously we all re-examined our relationship with his work. I nearly shared this on Instagram, but I kind of felt it was inappropriate. I don't know why. I wasn't that close to Mark at all, we had a fleeting connection. But it was such a special object."

You may know Jones from Sunroof, his joint project with Mute founder Daniel Miller, or from his solo work as Electrogenetic. His production discography includes the likes of Depeche Mode, Wire, Nick Cave and Einstürzende Neubauten, but he was a young engineer when he met Hollis.

"This was in 1979 or very early 1980," recalls Jones. "'Metamatic' was the first record I recorded and mixed, so I think I met Mark through John Foxx, who was my mentor. The first 16-track studio I went into was with John, which was the one in Camden Square owned by The Buggles. That's where I recorded some demos with Mark. We'd have been 25 or 26 at this point."

To help make sense of the tape, as well as triangulate a few details of Jones' fleeting engagement with Hollis, we're joined by Ben Wardle, author of the recent, acclaimed Hollis biography, 'A Perfect Silence'.

"This may well have been just before he'd signed the Island Records deal in 1980," says Wardle. "Howard Thompson at CBS paid for some demo time. I've never heard those original demos. 'Talk Talk', 'Mirror Man' and 'Tomorrow Started' – I think those were the ones. Thompson paid for two lots of demos. Quite a lot of songs!"

In his studio, Jones inserts the cassette into the player, rewinds it to the beginning and presses play, gently pulling up two faders on his console. With all the wow and flutter of a 40-year-old tape, the melancholic choral introduction to Van Morrison's 'Snow In San Anselmo' drifts into the room. It's a wonderful moment.

"That choral stab that came in at the beginning," says Wardle, "that's straight out of 'I Believe In You', isn't it? Uncanny!"

I remind Wardle of another parallel between those two songs – the working title of 'I Believe In You' was 'Snow In Berlin.'

"Yes! That's very interesting, isn't it?" exclaims Wardle. "I wish I'd had this when I wrote the book – that's a revelation! The key to this tape, as far as I'm concerned, is Mark's brother, Ed."

Ed Hollis, producer, and manager of Essex pub rockers Eddie And The Hot Rods, was ostensibly Mark's music mentor, even co-writing the song 'Talk Talk'.

"Back in 1979, it was hard to have such eclectic taste so young," continues Wardle. "Ed was always buying records from a well-known shop off Oxford Street, where Elton John actually used to work. They dealt with all the imports that were difficult to get hold of. Mark was exposed to this from a very early age because Ed was constantly playing it."

Hollis, says Wardle, would enthuse about John Coltrane. He cites the jazz standard, 'In A Sentimental Mood', which Coltrane recorded with Duke Ellington.

"During the opening, it sounds like the drummer's still adjusting his kit. That studio atmosphere… Mark wanted to emulate that on his solo album."

I point out that 'In A Sentimental Mood' is on the cassette.

"There we go!" says Wardle, clapping his hands together. "Another key to this is to understand that it's showing off. It's interesting that he goes for The Nerves' original of 'Hanging On the Telephone'. There's definitely a bit of the record collector, the musical snob there, saying, 'You might have thought that Blondie wrote this, but no, it was The Nerves', who were an obscure American powerpop band that probably never even got a release in the UK."

"It's an incredible list of tunes," adds Jones, holding Hollis' meticulously handwritten tracklist in the light. "Bands that I'd not even heard of at that time – Love, for instance."

"Oh, he was a huge Arthur Lee fan," says Wardle. "His voice was compared to Lee's several times."

Hollis had recorded onto the tape 'Alone Again Or', from Love's 1967 album, 'Forever Changes'. Also from those sessions, 'Your Mind And We Belong Together' was released as a single. The name of the track on the flip-side? 'Laughing Stock'.

"That's clearly where the Talk Talk album title comes from," says Wardle. "Some stuff like Marvin Gaye, you might think, 'OK, a bit obvious…', but back then, not so. At that time, some things were hard to find. You had to really invest in buying the records, listening to them and curating the tracks."

Later, Gareth Jones and I reflect on the extraordinary tunnel vision represented by the selection of tracks on Hollis' tape. Many of these influences would not be palpable in Talk Talk's music until their seminal brace of albums a decade or more later, and beyond that even, on Hollis' solo record in 1998.

"That's the arc of the trajectory," considers Jones. "He was aiming at something. He was obviously very meticulous and focused. Very clear. 'Look, here are my influences, this is what you need to listen to if you want to engage with what I'm trying to do'."

'Mark Hollis: A Perfect Silence' is out now, published by Rocket 88

HEAR AND NOW

Music players, redefined

Bored with listening to music on Bluetooth devices? Well, things might be set to change… Yamaha have joined forces with Swiss design school ÉCAL for a series of music players aimed to encourage interactivity. Students on the MA Product Design course were given a brief to engage listeners physically, and the six resulting prototype devices were showcased at the recent Milan Design Week. Two of the most imaginative examples are the Sound Frame (a wooden photo frame that triggers a specific playlist when an inanimate object is placed inside it) and the Spezi (pictured here), a pleasingly chunky speaker that allows for a smoother transition between the different music players commonly used in the home. Very cool it looks, too. **ecal.ch**

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PULSE

MYNA CYCLES

Techno lads hang with Cowley

WHO THEY?

Sounding like a bike shop for birds, Myna Cycles is actually the exciting new musical collaboration between Neil Cowley and Jacana People. Cowley, a contemporary pianist whose name will no doubt be familiar to you, is seemingly a world away from the more club-focused Jacana People. The Buckinghamshire duo run a neat line in blissed-out Bicep-style ambient electronics and place their influences as lying "somewhere between 90s rave culture, ambient, 70s psychedelia and environmentalism".

WHY MYNA CYCLES?

Their eponymous debut EP combines Jacana's sun-dappled dance music with the fragile acoustics of Cowley, and the result is a gorgeous collection of ambient techno. Just listen to Cowley's melancholic piano elevate on the silken softness of 'Tundra', sounding like Kiasmos on ketamine, or perhaps a tranquilised Bonobo (the musician, that is). This EP was not their first meeting, though. Jacana had previously remixed Cowley's still-water-smooth ambient piece, 'Souls Of The S-Bahn', while Cowley played keys on their charmingly scuffed 2021 single 'And The Lake Was…'. When entering Cowley's studio and seeing his collection of synths, the Jacana boys knew a more substantial collaboration was on the cards. "I was delighted to see their eyes light up," says Cowley. "Clearly, like me, they love the challenge of creating fresh sounds from chunks of metal."

TELL US MORE...

Neil Cowley is something of a child prodigy. At the age of 10, he played a Shostakovich concerto to over 1,000 people at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. He would go on to play piano on Adele's multi-platinum album, '21', but since disbanding The Neil Cowley Trio, his sound has taken a more electronic direction. Maybe 'Myna Cycles' is the culmination of his new musical journey. Or maybe it's something simpler. "Hopefully, what this EP demonstrates is that I just like hanging out with Jacana People," he says.

FAT ROLAND

'Myna Cycles' is out now on Cross Country

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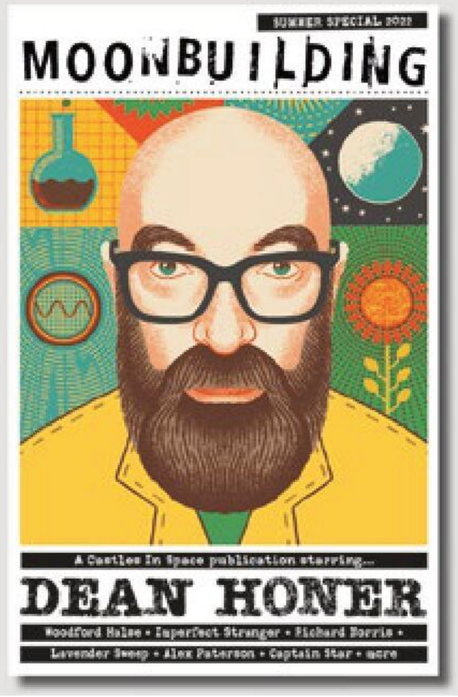

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NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **Nina Walsh**

Apologies for my recent absences. After various traumas and a stint in hospital, I was rescued by my old friend and angel Nina Walsh who invited me to recuperate at Facility 5, the idyllic Dorset enclave where she's been carrying on the vibrant creative mission ignited with her late partner Andrew Weatherall over 30 years ago.

Surrounded by dogs and pastoral calm, Nina has reinstalled the studio that saw them capture hours of music for both their Woodleigh Research Facility and his albums, while continuing her solo mission of 20-plus years.

Of all Weatherall's collaborators, none worked with him more closely or for longer than Nina. Her archive is colossal – comparable to an overheating bull rhino's scrotum fit to explode. This music (which includes Weatherall operating bespoke controls and keyboard), was kept under wraps by ultimately impotent elements, plunging Nina into another kind of personal hell after his passing over two years ago. An inexplicably ridiculous situation, it's been inspirational to watch her kicking against the pricks, while all the time considering what her telepathic partner-in-mischief would think. If the Weatherall massive knew what they were missing, including a final album that ranks among their best, mass circle jerking or hara-kiri might erupt.

Nina's empowering return begins with the development of the 'Music To Fall Asleep To – Delta Waves' project (released online in February) into a groundbreaking physical edition, launching the cryptic moniker Weatherbury Research Facility. "Designed to induce deep healing sleep through binaural frequency brain entrainment," the limited (100) edition CD comes in a signed package with a beautifully hand-crafted Orgone Accumulator infused with delta wave frequencies, and lab report. Encountered by many for the first time on Hawkwind's 'Space Ritual', the Orgone Accumulator was developed by science maverick Wilhelm Reich. A defiant, but doomed FBI target, Reich died in prison in 1957, but his theories were subsequently embraced by counterculture movements, and so live on.

Nina is also releasing the 'Retrospective' EP, boasting four tracks which showcase her supernatural 25-year songwriting career (including the astonishing 'My December', now retitled 'Don't Let The Bastards Grind You Down' thanks to invoking a Motorhead connection!).

Together, we're documenting her remarkable story and lifelong partnership with Weatherall in a forthcoming book exploding with acid house capers, life-changing music, irreverent humour, priceless insights and recent triumphs, and my own personal Weatherall and Sabres Of Paradise memories. We've also recorded a song I wrote about my DTs nightmare called 'Night Tremors', with a special guest manifesting on blood-boiling drums.

Nina and I agree that karma can be a wonderful thing. X

'Music To Fall Asleep To – Delta Waves' is out now on Facility 5.
The 'Retrospective' EP is out now on !K7

BERLIN VIBES

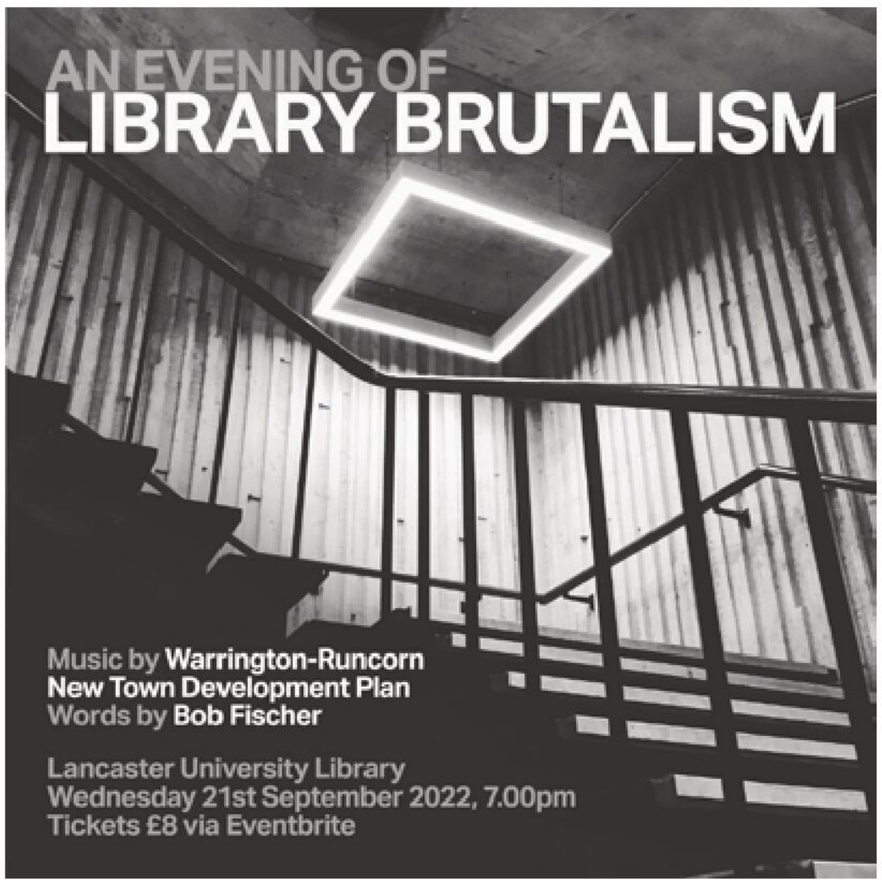
And podcast of the month goes to...

'Lost And Sound' is a weekly show hosted by Berlin-based writer Paul Hanford, "the only person ever to move to Berlin to stop being a DJ". With over 60 episodes available for your listening pleasure, including in-depth interviews with the likes of Hannah Peel, Nightmares On Wax, Anna Meredith, Ghostpoet, Thurston Moore, J Willgoose, Esq and many others, Hanford expertly delves into each artist's process while disucssing the small things that make their creative juices flow. Do check out Hanford's excellent 'Coming To Berlin' book too, which looks at how the city has developed into Europe's cultural and electronic music capital. **lostandsoundpodcast.com**

BOB'S YOUR UNCLE

One of our own hosts hauntology event

'Doctor Who', 'Bagpuss', public information films, the melancholic unease of the 1970s… these are subjects close to the heart of ace ES contributor Bob Fischer. On 21 September you can join him at Lancaster University for 'The Haunted Generation', a special illustrated talk where he explores the "deliciously fuzzy memories" of a 70s childhood while delving into the rise of popular hauntology. The talk will be followed by live, Brutalist-inspired analogue electronics from Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan. The perfect double act, if you ask us. Bag a ticket now for £8. **twitter.com/Bob_Fischer**



CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

RÖYKSOPP

After reneging on their plan to never make another album, Röyksopp are back with two cracking long-players at pretty much the same time, both featuring a host of collaborations and bolstered by some mighty peculiar multimedia content. But then the often weird and always wonderful Norwegian duo don’t like doing things by halves

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland seemed ready to take a step back after Röyksopp's 'The Inevitable End' slipped out in late 2014. Having spoken about no longer recording albums in the traditional format, the pair launched their 'Lost Tapes' project in 2019, uploading one-off songs and special mixes to various streaming services whenever it suited them and without needing to create tracks that fitted neatly together into a conceptual package.

"That became a much bolder statement than we intended it to be," grins Berge, sitting across from me in a conference room at the group's hotel in Oslo, Norway's capital city.

"To us, it was an offhand comment," says Brundtland. "Sort of, 'By the way, we don't think we will be doing another full, regular album'. Just a little thing. We weren't trying to make an explosive statement. Now it's become a big thing for some people."

It has been getting a lot busier in the world of Röyksopp of late, though. The Norwegian outfit have mounted a stealth campaign that has manifested itself in two new albums in quick succession – their sixth and seventh – plus a whole lot more besides. Under the appellative umbrella 'Profound Mysteries', the first of these records came out a few months ago and the second is due around about now.

"It's a bit like George Costanza sneaking back to work after resigning," says Brundtland, comparing their return to a scene from a much-loved episode of 'Seinfeld', the US TV sitcom.

Berge, who is now helping himself to a cup of coffee from the machine in the corner, roars with laughter before attempting to explain the duo's renewed interest in the old-fashioned and, some might suggest, moribund album format.

"What we wanted was to release music that was maybe 30 minutes long and put it straight out there without any filter. We didn't want to have to think about the track before it, or the track after it, as you do for an album. Or have it subjected to critical opinion. Or have it go through a record company executive."

He stops for a moment to consider what he's just said.

"Not that we usually take those things on board anyway… because we are quite stern as far as they go."

It's probably fair to say that Röyksopp have done pretty much everything their way over the two decades since 'Melody AM', the group's 2001 million-selling debut album. Perhaps because of this early success, people seem to assume they have the measure of Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland. But the closer you listen, the more intricate and involved and downright odd their music becomes – and the more the anomalies emerge.

Arriving near the end of a mainstream wave of downtempo electronica, the duo are really anything but straightforward. They certainly know how to fill dancefloors, but listening to the sonic worlds they construct through decent headphones is also recommended. There's a frivolous Röyksopp and a melancholic Röyksopp – and the division is occasionally so acute that they have to bring out two albums within months of each other.

"Sometimes you have to make an album called 'Junior' and then one called 'Senior'," says Brundtland, referring to their 2009 and 2010 releases. "You're talking about us having some sort of duality in our music and, well, if you give yourself enough space, you can make that into your own thing. We feel we have a lot to say all at once… and we meet people who have a lot to say all at once too. If you don't have time to explore the duality, then it will just be a mess."

While the 'Profound Mysteries' project sees Röyksopp in two-album territory again, this time it's more like a multiverse. The releases are bursting with collaborations, both musical and visual. Across the 20 tracks, there are no less than seven different vocalists, ranging from long-term associates like Norwegian singer Susanne Sundfør to newbies such as British chanteuse Pixx, and the sleeve art and video graphics for the albums are curated by Australian artist Jonathan Zawada. The tracks are also accompanied by a series of interpretive and often surreal short films created by members of Bacon, the Scandinavian production company.

Röyksopp launched the first of the new albums with a party at a former textile factory in the graffiti-strewn Grünerløkka district of Oslo. Speaking to Berge and Brundtland at the event, they were clearly enjoying themselves, but I had the feeling that they were there for business. Both men were born and raised a long way from Oslo and they appear to have very little affinity with the city – although in a lot of ways that slight sense of dislocation made it the perfect place to celebrate a work titled 'Profound Mysteries'.

A selection of the shorts formed the visual centrepiece of the gathering – 12 of them were shown concurrently on 12 separate screens – but it was Röyksopp's impromptu stint on the decks that really got the blood pumping at what was still a surprisingly respectable hour of the day. There was plenty of eclecticism on offer. Anyma's housey cover of Kate Bush's 'Running Up That Hill' mingled with Puerto Rican rapper Anuel AA's 'El Que Tenga Miedo A Morir, Que No Nazca'. Melé's 'Groove La Afrika' edged into ARTBAT's 'Flame'. It was flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants stuff – and the crowd devoured it whole.

"When we do something like that, there is no plan," Berge tells me when we meet at the group's hotel the following day. "Normally, when we play in a club in the UK or Germany or some other country, there's a bit more planning. But then eight out of 10 times, we will deviate very strongly away from whatever we had intended to do."

So quite different from a live set, then?

"Yeah, then we will have a setlist… like a 'normal' band," says Brundtland.

"We usually hand the setlist out to everyone working with us seven minutes before we go onstage," expands Berge. "We say, 'Here's the setlist', and then we have to reprogram everything. That's been our MO… much to everyone's annoyance."

One of the highlights of the first 'Profound Mysteries' album is 'Breathe', which Röyksopp recorded with Norwegian pop star Astrid S. I mention to Berge that Astrid S had already had a Top 40 hit in Norway with a song called 'Breathe' – a totally different song called 'Breathe', you understand – and I wonder if this was done deliberately, in keeping with the 'Profound Mysteries' theme. Berge looks ashen-faced at my suggestion.

"This is quite embarrassing," he mutters, looking from side to side. "I'm very poor at knowing about what is going on in someone else's career. I don't really go deep into research on the people that we work with. It's the little things that I usually like about them."

He leans towards my recorder and speaks as if to address the singer personally.

"I am sorry, Astrid, because I did not know. It might be your biggest hit, but I am a moron."

He pulls himself straight again and flashes a smile.

"We often have a vision, I guess, or at least some idea for a track before we approach a person," he says. "It might just be a thought or a sentiment that we want to somehow convey, particularly in the context of an album. You know, 'We need this or that for track number four'. And then we approach the person we have in mind and hopefully they say yes."

"But we don't have set rules for how we do these things," adds Brundtland. "Our collaborations have been everything from someone being invited into our universe, coming with a lot of ideas and melodies and lyrics, to us having prepared the table way out in front. It's different every time, I'd say."

Thinking about some of the illustrious artists Berge and Brundtland have worked with – Karin Dreijer, Alison Goldfrapp, Jamie Irrepressible and Robyn, to name just a few – are they all muses in some way?

"A muse is a beautiful idea," replies Brundtland. "I love that. So the answer to your question is, yes, of course. We invite people who have universes of their own in terms of their art and we merge those with ours to see what happens. That's always the starting point. And then the rest is details."

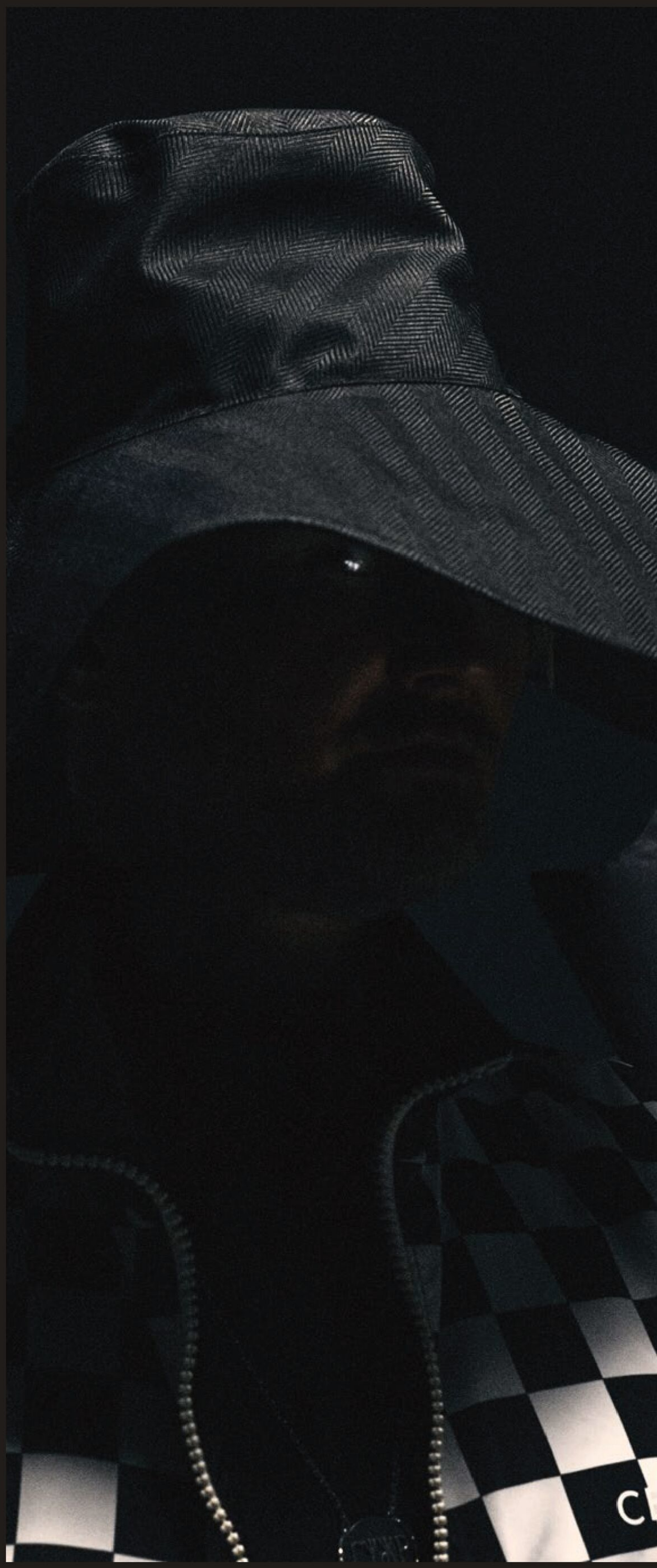
Röyksopp often encourage partnerships with artists you might not imagine would be an obvious fit with them.

"We feel it can add some sort of good tension," says Berge. "Susanne Sundfør is a very skilled, classically trained musician, for instance. She plays piano and guitar, so she is more in the traditional school of a singer-songwriter. She knows all about acoustic instruments, but perhaps less about synths… until she met us. She has started playing a bit more with synths and electronics now.

"In this sense, then, the word 'muse' can go both ways. We have had situations where an artist will come and do something better than was originally planned. A tangential shift will lead them to a place that's completely opposite to what both they and us had envisaged."

By way of example, Brundtland recalls having an entirely different vision for 'Something In My Heart' on 'The Inevitable End' until Jamie Irrepressible began singing his own lyrics. The end result is one of the best tracks on the album.

"Sometimes even we are surprised," he notes.



The short films accompanying the albums are a fascinating part of the 'Profound Mysteries' project. They are all beautifully turned out, while being highly diverse in their peculiarity.

Check out the dolled-up elderly couple in 'I Hate My Shelf', which is soundtracked by 'Breathe', and compare it to 'The Conversation', starring a vexed priest and inspired by 'This Time, This Place…'. And also, one presumes, Catholic guilt. Or try 'Initiation', which starts with a white-robed cult member making a squirrel explode into flames on a golf course by the power of telekinesis as 'There, Beyond the Trees' plays out in the background. 'The Downfall', on the other hand, will make you think of Sisyphus running up and down a mountain ridge attached to a giant yo-yo while Alison Goldfrapp croons on 'Impossible'. See what I mean about peculiarity?

"The only rules the filmmakers had to obey were their pieces had to be more than 20 seconds long and they had to feature some element of the track," says Berge. "It could have been one hi-hat if they wanted, although most of the directors didn't do it like that. We liked the idea of a subjective interpretation of the music without any interference from us. We don't want to always provide the final answer."

"These films are not the official music videos," emphasises Brundtland. "Each of them is just one way of seeing the track. So we're not telling the listener, 'This is it, this is what you're supposed to see when you listen to this song from now on'. It just adds an expanse and I think people will know they are free to continue to interpret the music themselves."

Jonathan Zawada's work on the albums is another talking point. His CV includes numerous record sleeves for Warp and commissions for the likes of Apple, Nike, Adidas and BMW, but he's surpassed himself here. As well as the cover art for the two albums, Zawada has produced a graphic artefact and a "visualiser" (that's a video to you and me) for each of the 20 tracks. He specialises in crafting hyperreal and meticulously detailed images with a fusion of old and new world tools, a similitude that isn't lost on Berge.

"He likes the hands-on stuff that you get from old analogue equipment," he says. "In our case, it's turning dials and flicking switches, as well as creating the pristine digital soundscapes. In his case, drawing is his number one passion, but he loves computer graphics and forgotten technology too. Jonathan is interested in marrying these elements into a seamless whole, which is also what we try to do with our music."

Röyksopp first came across Zawada when they noticed a promotional campaign featuring his cover art for future bass pioneer Flume's 2016 album 'Skin'. It's fairly typical of the very arbitrary way they choose their working partners. A change of cadence in a voice on a single line heard on the radio or the flash of a street poster seen through a car window can often be enough to catch their attention and have them hunting for a phone number or an email address.

"Another thing that we have in common with Jonathan is a fondness for nature," continues Berge. "Not necessarily a beautiful sunset, we all like that, but the little things. He has expressed a great love for the petals on a flower, for instance, and not in a new agey, hippy kind of way. It's just the wonder of the aesthetics, the intrinsic beauty of the little things."

"There's also something that has happened with technology recently and it allows you to feel the natural beauty through digital motion," asserts Brundtland. "This wasn't really possible before. Digital art has struggled since its inception, but the systems have now advanced to a level where the visuals are actually alive."

Röyksopp are viewed as one of the leading lights of the "Bergen Wave", a phrase coined by the Norwegian media to describe the thriving music scene that developed in the west coast city of Bergen in the late 1990s. With its narrow cobbled streets and houses clinging to the hills, it's been dubbed "the heart of the fjords". It reportedly rains for around 200 days of the year there, but Berge talks of a warm vibe that emanates everywhere you go in the city.

"The thing is, we are not from Bergen," notes Brundtland. "We were born in Tromsø. It had its own part to play in the rise of electronic music, but it's less known than the Bergen story."

"Electronic music in Norway – modern electronic music – started in Tromsø," declares Berge with an air of pride.

Whereas Bergen has a population of 280,000, about half the size of Oslo, Tromsø has only 75,000 inhabitants – although it might have been more if fewer musicians and DJs hadn't left for Bergen in search of successful recording careers in the 1990s. Tromsø is more than 1,000 miles north of the capital and 200 miles above the Arctic Circle. There's permanent daylight during the month of June and permanent darkness during December.

"It's just so physically far away from everywhere that there wasn't anything else to do but to look abroad for inspiration," says Brundtland. "Instead of looking to Oslo, you might as well look to London or Brussels, because it didn't make a difference. The Tromsø thing really came out of punk and new wave in the early 80s, and then it sort of became electronic music, dance music, later on. Some people made the transition – well, almost – while others laid the groundwork by importing records into northern Norway."

"The most innovative music here usually comes from all the small places outside the cities," offers Berge. "It was the same with the black metal scene. Without trying to offend anyone, the evidence of there having been a scene in Oslo, even in the late 80s… well, there's nothing to show for it other than people saying, 'I invented house in 1981'."

At which point, Berge mentions Biosphere, aka Geir Jenssen, who has a fundamental role in the story of Röyksopp.

"He's like the godfather, or perhaps one of three godfathers, of Norwegian electronic music. He's released a lot of records under different names."

Jenssen was the synth player with Tromsø dreampop band Bel Canto when he started using the pseudonym Bleep to put out sundry white label dance tracks. A one-off Bleep album, 'The North Pole By Submarine', appeared in 1990, after which he adopted the name Biosphere. Was he a mentor to the young Berge and Brundtland?

"Not necessarily a mentor, but he definitely took us under his wing," answers Berge. "We were born in the late 70s and we were kids – literally – when we first met him. We rang his doorbell and gave him a DAT cassette. We said, 'This is our music… can you give us some pointers?'. And he took us on the road with him."

Berge and Brundtland later hooked up with two friends to form Aedena Cycle, a Tromsø group whose 'The Traveller's Dream' 12-inch came out in 1994 on Apollo, the ambient offshoot of R&S. Biosphere was also signed to Apollo. Aedena Cycle took their name from the title of a series of sci-fi graphic novels by the French artist Mœbius (aka Jean Giraud), best known for the legendary comics anthology 'Métal Hurlant', as well as putting his stamp on films like 'Alien' and 'Tron'.

"They were these very LSD-influenced comics from the 70s and early 80s that we really loved," says Berge. "I think Mœbius must be popular culture's most unsung hero."

Berge and Brundtland left Tromsø for Bergen in 1997. Within a year, they were working as Röyksopp, issuing their earliest records on Tellé, the Norwegian label most closely associated with Bergen Wave. Their first single, 'So Easy', was used on a television advert for T-Mobile in the UK and was followed soon after by the effortlessly catchy 'Eple', which is still one of the band's most popular tracks.

By the time of their 'Melody AM' album in 2001, Röyksopp were being championed by hipster magazines such as The Face. The record went on to sell almost half a million copies in the UK alone, most of them in the first 12 months of its release. Were they surprised by its success?

"I could never have foreseen that it would become as big as it did," says Berge. "But it was a slow build. At the start, it was picked up by the underground. When we were in London, we'd hear it in a cool pub in Shoreditch, then we'd go down to Brixton and they'd be playing it there too. The tastemakers, or whatever you want to call them, were there at an early stage of the album."

"It was as if you were going into a wave," says Brundtland. "The beginning of a wave actually tells you how big it is going to be – and you'd know that intuitively, even if you hadn't been to the seaside very many times. We just felt like this would push us all the way up to the crest, or at least that's how I remember it."

Röyksopp's second album, 'The Understanding', didn't come out until 2005. They were so busy in the interim, mainly remixing other artists and touring (which they see as an add-on to what they do), it was put on the back-burner for a while. And when the recording did get underway, they took their time about it. They both say they love working in the studio. It's the process, rather than the final product, that they thrive on.

"I don't know whether we would be better at what we do if we had to struggle more when we're making an album," ponders Berge, perhaps a little sardonically.

"No," says Brundtland, putting that old rock 'n' roll canard to bed with admirable certitude. "If it was hell making an album? I don't think so, in all honesty. Part of the reason the recording takes time is because we enjoy the work. We don't have to rush to get it out there."

'The Understanding' was, ironically, largely misunderstood on its release. It still sounds fresh, though. Brundtland likens its reception to the misapprehension that greeted Air – a band Röyksopp have often been compared to over the last couple of decades – when the French duo followed up 'Moon Safari' with the now reassessed and even revered soundtrack to 'The Virgin Suicides'.

"It felt like a related experience," he notes. "You feel these small frustrations artistically when people have very specific expectations that you will make the same product every time."

"Yeah," interjects Berge. "'Hey, why didn't you just make 'Eple' once more?'"

"But you know that, in your heart, if you were to do this, you would do something wrong towards yourself," says Brundtland.

RÖYKSOPP

We need to discuss the underlying weirdness of Röyksopp's work. It's long been there, but with the 'Profound Mysteries' albums it's more a kind of suburban weird pitched somewhere between 'Twin Peaks' and a Scandinavian TV crime drama. It's hard to put your finger on what it is precisely, but it does feel like something strange is lurking in the dark, especially on tracks such as '(Nothing But) Ashes…' and 'This Time, This Place…'.

"Well, I'm glad you've picked that up," says Berge. "I'm not saying there are any definite answers but, yeah, that's kind of the intention we had. We have a certain mystical quirk in us, but without being too jokey, and I'd say that is more prominent on the first of these albums. The second one is probably a bit more accessible.

"I don't know how much I would want to steer people in any direction, or shape their view of it, but we do like quirkiness. I mean, everybody knows we hail from the sticks. Tromsø really is a David Lynch landscape – the secrets in the forest – and that's what we grew up with. So I think it's inescapable for us."

To emphasise the point, the pair talk about traipsing around the glaciers close to Tromsø, searching for things they could record, manipulating and merging found sounds into their music surprisingly early in their development as artists.

"We got hold of a Sony DATman, which was a portable data recorder," explains Berge. "This was in 1988, when they were still very new, and we would record everything we could. I can remember us once throwing a glass bottle, which was unusable and rubbish, onto a concrete floor… although that had already been done by The Art Of Noise, of course.

"After a while, we began to understand that the key was to have the mic a certain way [gesticulating with an imaginary microphone] and being able to get the ambience of more non-specific places, like an airport. We learned that pretty early on. By the time we recorded 'Melody AM', we had a lot of that baked into it."

The natural world continues to play a part in the group's music to this day.

"People always ask how we get our reverb and delay," says Berge. "It's sampled field recordings that we make, just looped or pasted onto other sounds. Using nature's reverb is central to what we do. We love working with textures and the quantum details you can hear on headphones or whatever, building a sonic world you can re-listen to and discover new things within the music beyond the melody and the chords. Like, 'Did you hear that little sound of shaving in the background?'."

The blend of analogue with digital is another notable aspect of Röyksopp's approach to recording. They've never had any compunction about mixing the two.

"When some of the acoustic musicians first went to digital hard disc recorders, their albums sounded very bad," says Brundtland. "Whereas for the people who combined analogue and digital with acoustic, it simply added another dimension. To be clear, all these things are mixed into the computer at the end, but we love analogue stuff. It's essential to what we do, basically. It's the paint itself."

Röyksopp started 2014 in good shape. 'Do It Again', a five-track mini-album with Robyn, topped the Billboard Electronic Music Chart and was followed by a well-received joint tour. But when 'The Inevitable End' came out towards the end of the year, it somehow felt slightly jaded. If this really was to be their last album, they were going out with a whimper.

"Yes, I appreciate that," says Berge. "I probably shouldn't admit to this, but I do concur. I'm not saying we weren't focused during 'The Inevitable End', but you can maybe sense there was a bit more chaos and turmoil in our lives then, for whatever reason that might have been."

"I think the material is actually there on 'The Inevitable End', but maybe the form is just wrong for some of the tracks," offers Brundtland. "I believe our art has landed in a very nice space now, though. There's a lot of variety in the 'Profound Mysteries' project, which helps each of the individual pieces of music."

"I agree," says Berge. "But we do love everything that we've done, even though it sounds like we're slagging 'The Inevitable End' off."

"It can take it," chuckles Brundtland.

The first 'Profound Mysteries' album is put together in such a way that it's supposed to feel like Röyksopp are emerging from the dark. I listened to it while I was sitting on the plane at Gatwick on my way to Oslo and it soundtracked the take-off with remarkable precision – the ambivalence of '(Nothing But) Ashes…' as the jet pulls away from the departure gate, the traversing of the runway with the upbeat 'The Ladder', and then the ascension with Alison Goldfrapp on 'Impossible'.

'Profound Mysteries II' is far less diffident, with drop-laden floorfillers like 'Unity', which features Karen Harding. It's also loaded with miniature and not so miniature homages to artists who have influenced Röyksopp over the years – from Erik Satie to Adamski. Kraftwerk are referenced on 'Control' (and also on 'Press «R»' on the first album), while even Fleetwood Mac and 90s R&B get a look-in. And is that a cheeky nod to Daft Punk in the Nile Rodgers-style guitar on 'Oh, Lover'?

"It's difficult not to be influenced in some way by the French scene," says Berge. "We feel we've been marching alongside them, but perhaps in their wake at times. We have to applaud Daft Punk, particularly for 'Homework' and 'Discovery', which are great albums."

I sense a "but" coming…

"I might be taking a big leap here, but I do think their 'Random Access Memories' album suggested that they may have had a sneaky peek at what we'd done previously. It was more proggy, for a start."

"And 'The Understanding' too…", interjects Brundtland.

"Yes, 'The Understanding', exactly," agrees Berge. "We did a tour with Sébastien Tellier and then Guy-Manuel from Daft Punk worked with him on his 'Sexuality' album. We have this unverified theory that they might have come across us and they might have thought, 'Oh, yeah, that's interesting, let's try to do something like that'. But this is just speculation and we love Daft Punk… obviously."

I've already mentioned that Röyksopp have been compared to Air in the past, but there are some parallels with the career of Daft Punk too. So the possibility of some symbiotic exchange, whether conscious or unconscious, is not such a crazy idea. And the Norwegian duo's progression is certainly as impressive, as uncompromising and, in many ways, as mysterious as their helmeted counterparts.

Not bad for a couple of boys from the sticks.

"I think it makes sense," continues Berge. "If you love music, which I imagine all these people we've been talking about do, then you'll think, 'Hmm, what are those guys up to?', and you'll have a look at what's going on over the fence."

Another example of suburban weird, then, but on a much bigger scale.

'Profound Mysteries' is out now and 'Profound Mysteries II' follows on 19 August, both on Dog Triumph

THE BEST OF BERGEN (VIA TROMSØ)

The Norwegian press came up with the name **Bergen Wave** to describe the large number of bands and producers – of all shapes and genres – that developed in the west coast city of Bergen in the late 1990s. We've picked out 10 of the best electronic albums associated with the movement, although we're starting the story in another place at another time...

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

BEL CANTO
White-Out Conditions
CRAMMED DISCS, 1987

All waves begin somewhere and the movement known as Bergen Wave actually started in Tromsø, a city around 1,000 miles further north. Bel Canto, Biosphere, Mental Overdrive and Röyksopp are just some of the artists that hail from Tromsø, the former having released their pioneering electronic album 'White-Out Conditions' as early as 1987. From the wistful beauty of 'Dreaming Girl' to the glacial heft of 'Baltic Ice-Breaker', the record reflects the mystical energy of the Arctic Circle channelled through concomitant indie acts like the Cocteau Twins. Bel Canto found a home on Crammed Discs, relocating to Brussels to join the Belgian label's ever-expanding world roster, with singer Anneli Drecker and multi-instrumentalist Nils Johansen taking a more obviously commercial path in the years that followed. The band's original synth player and programmer Geir Jenssen had other ideas, though. He made his way back to Tromsø and began putting out left-field ambient house records as Biosphere.

BIOSPHERE
Patashnik
ORIGO SOUND/APOLLO, 1994

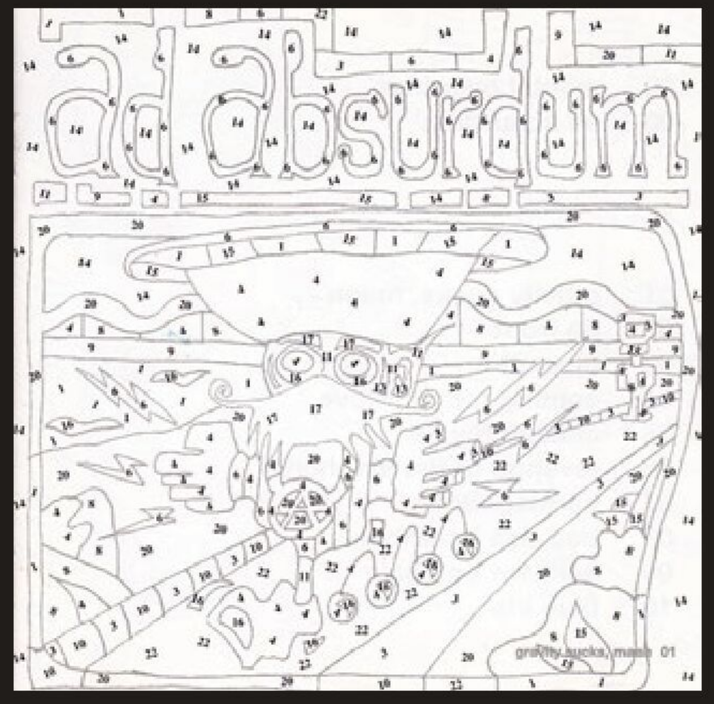
Geir Jenssen's return to Tromsø in the early 90s helped to put the city – hitherto known for its icy fjords, craggy peaks and proximity to the Northern Lights – on the musical map. The first Biosphere releases inspired a small army of house and techno nerds to also start making music, among them Bjørn Torske and Rune Lindbæk. Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland also beat a path to Jenssen's door, forming Aedena Cycle with two associates before starting again as Röyksopp when the pair relocated to Bergen. 'Patashnik', the second Biosphere album, established Jenssen's tactile techno sound, with ambient phrases and samples lifted from places such as 'The Krays', the 1990 crime biopic starring the Kemp brothers from Spandau Ballet. The record was issued on Origo Sound in Norway and on Apollo, an offshoot of the mighty R&S label, elsewhere in Europe. Jenssen claimed that 'Patashnik' was a Russian slang word for a cosmonaut lost in space, but after much googling that doesn't appear to check out.

DRUM ISLAND
Drum Island
APOLLO, 1997

Looking retrospectively, the short-lived Drum Island were a veritable supergroup of Tromsø and Bergen names – the two future members of Röyksopp, plus Rune Lindbæk, Ole Johan Mjøs and Gaute Barlindhaug, although at the time they were all just starting to find their way in the music business. The group's self-titled album was another product of the Tromsø massive before their mini-diaspora, following Biosphere into the world of digital sampling, field recording and electronic beats. There's a clear acid jazz influence to the record, but there's plenty of room for experimentation too. 'Riversprite' is built upon recordings of someone splashing about in a fjord and 'La Danse Electrique' is a Balearic mix of disco and strings with added castanets, while 'Phizzz' is what happens when you decide to speed up your bossa nova to give things a bit more pep.

MENTAL OVERDRIVE
Ad Absurdum
VIRGIN, 1999

The Tromsø and Bergen scenes coalesced even more with Mental Overdrive, aka Per Martinsen, although "scene" is perhaps too defined a word for the northern city's social milieu. When Martinsen and Bjørn Torske put on the first rave in Tromsø, they hired a local youth centre. Martinsen became a frequent visitor to Bergen after Torske moved there, but he also spent a lot of time in Belgium, releasing his first three Mental Overdrive records on R&S in the early 1990s. 'Ad Absurdum', which came out on Virgin in 1999, cemented Martinsen's position as one of the godfathers of Norwegian techno, with tracks like 'Disco Dog' and 'Da Froot' exhibiting not only a keen sense of the absurd but also the technical ability to pull it off. There have been some brilliant Mental Overdrive releases in the last decade or so too, especially the 'Cycls' album in 2013, while Martinsen's work with his wife Aggie Peterson under the name Frost is worth investigating as well.



BJØRN TORSKE

Trøbbel

TELLÉ, 2001

The record that carries the catalogue number TELLÉ 012 is, as you'd imagine, the 12th release from Tellé Records, but it's significant that Bjørn Torske's 'Trøbbel' was the first album issued by the upstart Norwegian independent following a slew of singles by the likes of Röyksopp, Annie and Ralph Myerz & The Jack Herren Band. The idea for the label sprang from of a Bergen record shop run by Mikal Telle, a pop enthusiast who rubbed shoulders with a small group of talented musicians and wanted to do something to help them. Launched in 1998, Tellé would become as synonymous with Bergen as Sub Pop once was with Seattle. Bjørn Torske had already created a stir with his 1998 debut, 'Nedi Myra', his freaky acid house bringing a sense of the unexpected to dancefloors everywhere, and it was a coup for Tellé to release the follow-up. Torske's early recordings would prove to be a major influence on up-and-coming homegrown DJs like Todd Terje.

RÖYKSOPP

Melody AM

WALL OF SOUND, 2001

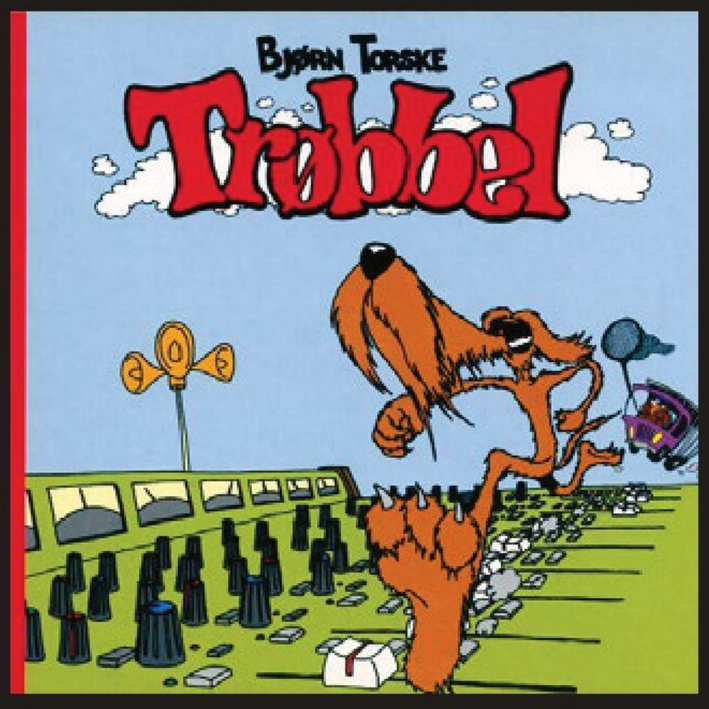
Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland pitched up in Bergen in 1999 and it wasn't long before their Drum Island experience was helping to prepare them for what would become their debut album as Röyksopp. What they weren't prepared for was the massive global success of 'Melody AM', although being laid-back Tromsønians they took it all in their stride. The duo's first two singles, 'So Easy' and 'Eple', appeared on Tellé, with Wall Of Sound and Universal quickly carrying them to a much wider audience. Television adverts and video game placements came soon after, securing the attention of big tech companies like Apple (handily, "eple" is the Norwegian word for the fruit). And then there was 'Poor Leno', featuring real-life Bergen man Erlend Øye singing dolefully and soulfully through some auto-tune equipment. For a while in the early part of the 21st century, Röyksopp could be heard reverberating through the walls at all hours of the day from Shoreditch to Shanghai.

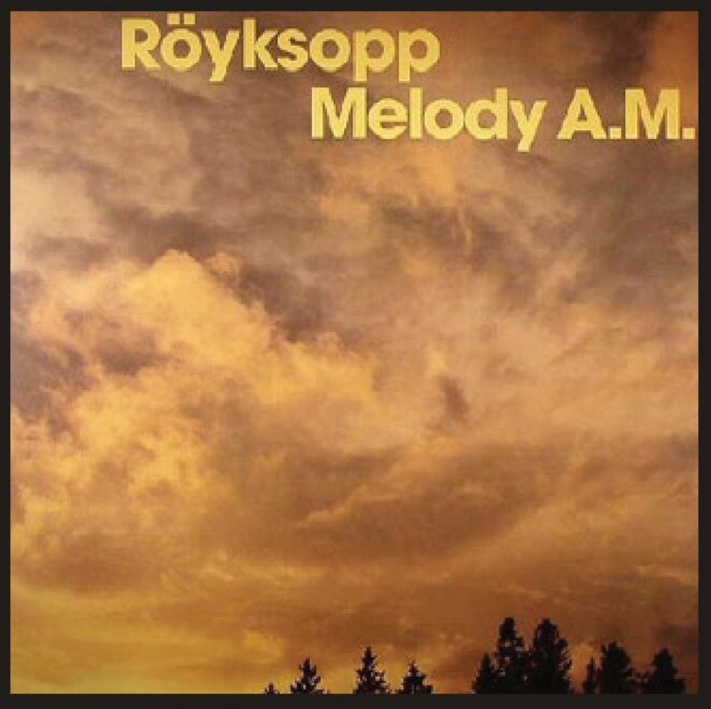
ERLEND ØYE

Unrest

ASTRALWERKS, 2003

It was only a matter of time before Erlend Øye made an electronic album of his own. Kings Of Convenience, his partnership with Eirik Glambek Bøe, were hailed as the new Simon & Garfunkel when they released 'Quiet Is The New Loud' in 2001, riding high on the Bergen Wave as acoustic indie fellow travellers. Øye had already had a starring role on Rökysopp's 'Melody AM' and formed The Whitest Boy Alive, while KOC were remixed by friends old and new on 'Verses' in 2002. For 'Unrest', he entered the studio with an international register of electronic producers, including Schneider TM, Prefuse 73 and Morgan Geist, aka Storm Queen, but there's a welcome intimacy to this album. Øye has a canny knack of making the limitations of his voice his main strength, especially on the gorgeous 'The Athlete', produced by Minizza, which teeters delicately between French and English and then back again.





ANNIE

Anniemal

679 RECORDINGS, 2004

Anne Lilia Berge Strand moved to Bergen in her early teens and met Tore Andreas Kroknes, who was making house music as Erot, when she was 20. That changed everything. 'The Greatest Hit', a track co-produced by Kroknes and built around a sample of Madonna's 'Everybody', propelled Annie to chart success at home in 1999. Tragically, Kroknes died from a degenerative heart condition two years later at the age of only 23. "For a long time, I was too depressed and exhausted to do anything," Annie later told The New York Times. "But then I thought, 'Tore would be quite upset with you if you just stopped making music'." She returned to the studio and began working on what would become 'Anniemal', an electropop record that found an international audience thanks to the spotlight shone on it by the first generation of music bloggers. Three tracks were produced by Röyksopp and the pre-album single 'Chewing Gum' was massive, making all the hipster end-of-year lists in 2003.

DATAROCK

Datarock Datarock

YOUNG ASPIRING PROFESSIONALS, 2005

If Datarock were surfing the end of the original Bergen Wave, they were also about to catch the start of the often maligned nu rave scene. The duo at the core of the group are Bergen musicians Fredrik Saroea and Ketil Mosnes, the former a regular collaborator with Annie over the years, and their disco-punk sound still seems resolutely fixed in the mid-2000s. Take some Talking Heads-inspired angular hooks, add some 'Flight Of The Conchords' humour, throw in some campy sexual innuendos that haven't aged particularly well, and you have yourself a Datarock. Their debut album will be a perfect artefact for when they eventually open the Museum Of Indie Sleaze, but it's great fun in places, almost worth it for the outstanding hi-hat work on 'Fa-Fa-Fa' alone. Come for the bawdy David Byrne impression on 'Sex Me Up', stay for the excellent drum programming on 'Ugly Primadonna', and thrill to the oddly touching lo-fi electronica of 'The Most Beautiful Girl'.

CASIOKIDS

Fück Midi

KARISMA, 2006

The Guardian reported the stirrings of a second Bergen Wave in 2013, but the truth is the pop never really stopped coming from the self-confident city, with bands like Casiokids making great strides in the years in between. These neo-psychedelic synthpoppers were given a boost in their quest for world domination in 2010, when they were one of four artists awarded a prize of a million krona (about £100,000 in today's money) by Norwegian 80s superstars a-ha. Listening to 'Fück Midi', Casiokids' debut, it's intriguing to consider what appealed so much to Morten, Mags and Pål. In an interview a couple of years later, the Scandipop underlings expressed a desire to merge Abba, Technotronic and Whigfield, while at the same time fessing up to more eclectic and frankly cooler influences that included Sun Ra, John Coltrane and Fela Kuti, as well as Bergen acolyte Bjørn Torske. It's all there if you listen closely enough.

BLUEDOT 2022

Under the shadow of Jodrell Bank's gigantic Lovell telescope, Bluedot returns for a scintillating weekend of live music, science and culture

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON

PHOTO: TOM MARTIN

PHOTO: TOM MARTIN

TIM PEAKE - PHOTO: SCOTT SALT

Midnight at Bluedot 2022, and the towering parabolic dish of the Lovell telescope blazes with psychedelic sci-fi imagery visible from 30 miles away, lighting up the Cheshire Plain. There are few places more enchanting than Jodrell Bank in July, especially now that Britain's most magical music-meets-science festival is back in action after a long pandemic sabbatical. Named after legendary TV astronomer Carl Sagan's oft-quoted observation about Earth as seen from deep space, Bluedot has the strange power of making you feel cosmically insignificant and supernova huge at the same time. It may not be rocket science, but it comes pretty close. And the stars look very different tonight.

Eclectic and electric, Bluedot offers a rich mixtape of treats for brain and senses alike. Alongside a broad musical menu from Metronomy to Mogwai, Squarepusher to Kojey Radical, this year's programme also features astrophysicists, actors and astronauts. What other event could book Tim Peake and Maxine Peake, and draw huge crowds with both?

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING - PHOTO: SCOTT SALT

By happy serendipity, this year's boundary-pushing bill is book-ended by world-class female avant-pop icons, each commanding huge orchestras. Long postponed by global events, Björk's 'Orkestral' show with Manchester's Hallé Orchestra is set to close the weekend. But festivities open in grand style on Thursday with Hannah Peel and Paraorchestra, the world's only large-scale ensemble of professional disabled and non-disabled musicians.

Led by conductor Charles Hazlewood, this massed collective plays tracks from their recent collaborative album, 'The Unfolding', plus some exquisite extras including Peel's twinkly music-box interpretations of New Order's 'Blue Monday' and Soft Cell's 'Tainted Love'. It's adventurous, poignant, uplifting and very Bluedot. A spine-tingling start to an otherwordly midsummer night's dream of a festival.

Besides its musical component, Bluedot is essentially hauntology central, a living museum of mid-century modernism, a feast of 'Tomorrow's World' nostalgia for the lost techno-utopian future that post-war Britain promised but never quite delivered. Completed in 1957, the Lovell telescope itself is a product of this progressive era, with its mass social housing, bold engineering projects, public information films, space-age design aesthetic, Oliver Postgate's hand-knitted animated characters and Radiophonic arts lab soundscapes. A time when Labour prime ministers proudly boasted about the white heat of technological revolution.

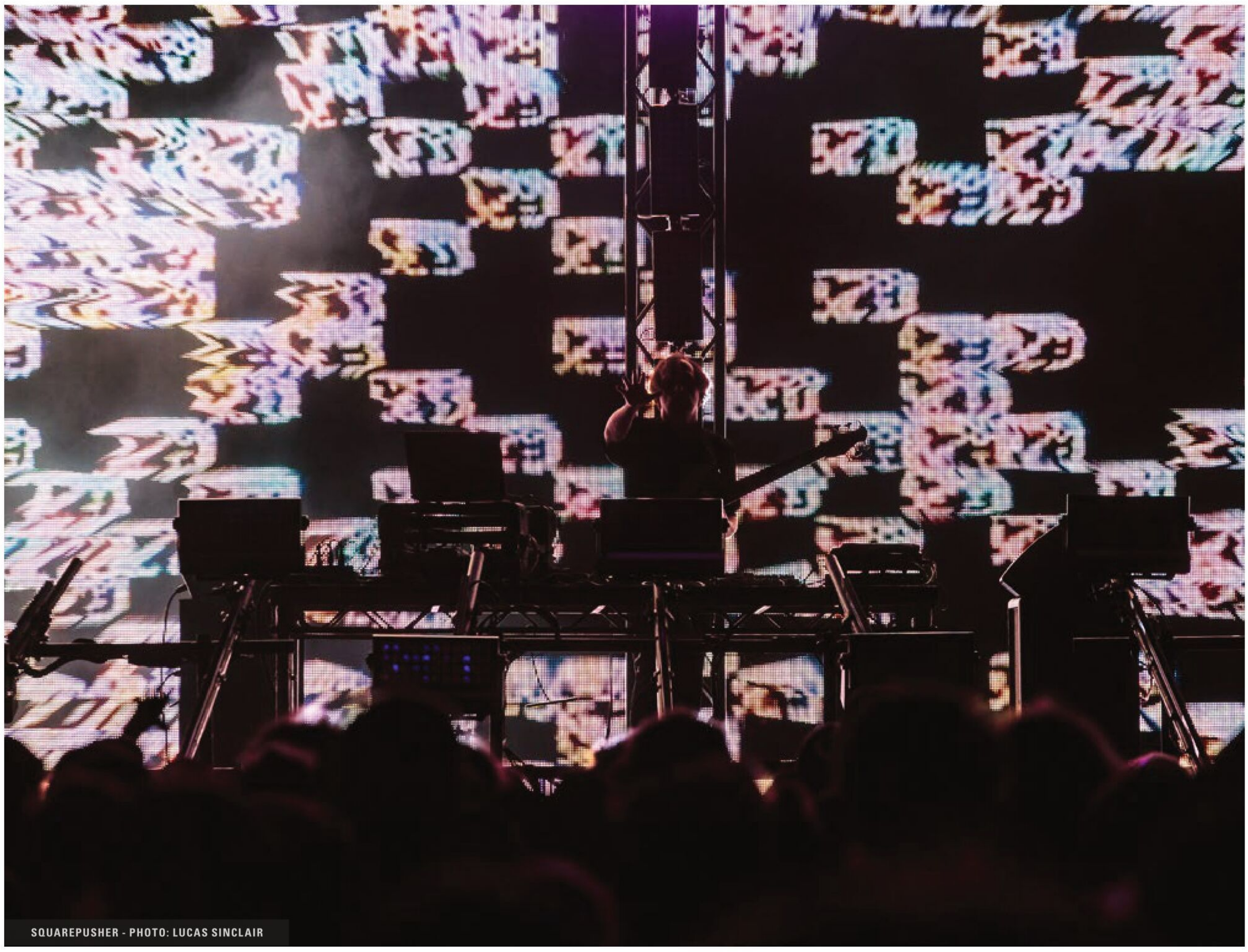
The pop culture aftershocks of this fertile period, from screenings of 'The Clangers' to lectures on Cold War technology, are woven into the festival's fabric. Indeed, a live talk about Delia Derbyshire Day – featuring Hannah Peel, current Radiophonic Workshop musical director Mark Ayres and soundtrack composer Nainita Desai – is just one of the various nerdgasm events designed to lure in Bluedot's hardcore contingent of analogue synth-geeks and Betamax retro-futurists.

Naturally, Electronic Sound is in the front row to witness Ayres play a rare Delia track, the deliciously bleepy 'Dance From Noah', which was once used to demonstrate Peter Zinovieff's fabled EMS synthesiser range.

"It sounds like it could be released on Warp today," says Ayres, approvingly.

If any contemporary act in this year's Bluedot line-up embodies this antique modernist aesthetic to a tee, it is Public Service Broadcasting, an inspired last-minute addition to the line-up after Covid forced Spiritualized to pull out. Having paid impressionistic tribute to Berlin on their most recent album, 'Bright Magic', which draws on everything from Kraftwerk to Bowie to Blixa Bargeld, J Willgoose, Esq and his white-suited lab assistants seem more comfortable with their conceptual approach nowadays – more streamlined and funky, less mannered and apologetically zany.

PSB's audiovisual hymns to post-war collectivism, the space race and the South Wales mining industry are suffused with hauntological yearning, while newer tracks like 'Blue Heaven' and the vocoder-powered 'People, Let's Dance' update the band's sepia-toned Airfix-kit-nostalgia with a sexy Day-Glo 1980s europop makeover. Lovely stuff.



SQUAREPUSHER - PHOTO: LUCAS SINCLAIR

It may be an international festival with an intergalactic outlook, but Bluedot also has an emphatically northern English accent, drawing on the enduring post-punk and electronic legacies of nearby Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool.

This year's line-up is once again rich in local talent, from Lancashire acid-kraut/psych-rocker Jane Weaver to Liverpudlian art-pop quartet Stealing Sheep and Cheshire's very own indie mop-top crooner Tim Burgess, alongside a stellar constellation of veteran Mancunian candidates like A Guy Called Gerald. Even the weather remains resolutely northern all weekend, with lashing rain between bursts of sullen sunshine.

Once again, the spirit of Factory Records hangs heavy in the air here, not least on the countless T-shirts celebrating Joy Division and (former festival headliners) New Order. But also in the living, breathing examples of former Haçienda regulars like A Certain Ratio, whose sinewy disco-punk jazz-funk still sounds amazingly lean, lithe and box-fresh.

With frontman Jez Kerr absent due to injury, youthful new recruit Ellen Beth Abdi takes over the main vocal duties, while multi-instrumentalist dynamo Donald Johnson pays touching tribute to "our friend" Paul Ryder, the Happy Mondays bass guitarist who died suddenly just days before. They may be the oldest swingers in town, but ACR are still smoking on the go-go scene.

Another Bluedot act drawing self-consciously but fruitfully on that timeless Factory aesthetic is LoneLady, aka Julie Campbell, whose tension-filled synth-funk set buries awkward passions and warm heartbeats beneath cool, dry, sharp-angled Mancunian attitude. "Cloudy skies. Just how I like it," she quips. Classic northern soul.

This year's Bluedot is also buzzing with a newer, younger cohort of spiky northern talents. On the back of their new album, 'Fear Fear' – made, they say, for "agitating and dancing" – Todmorden's Working Men's Club play a blinding set. Tight-lipped frontman Syd Minksy-Sargeant tugs at his shirt as he menacingly prowls the brim of the stage, glaring and intense, daring the audience not to surrender to his pulsing, declamatory, synth-rock sermons.

ACR - PHOTO: JODY HARTLEY

By contrast, fellow Yorkshire band Yard Act spice their Mercury Prize-nominated junk shop punk-pop with verbose comedic rants and weapons-grade sarcasm as frontman James Smith prods at the eternal open wounds of class, wealth inequality and gentrification. And a rammed set by Manchester's own W H Lung, winningly named after a Chinese supermarket, offers an electrifying masterclass in fuzzed-up shoegazing krautronica.

In their own different ways, all these bands are adding to the legacy of local legends like New Order, Cabaret Voltaire, Pulp and The Fall. But, crucially, the parallel is more in bullish self-belief than slavish recreation.

Citizens of Bluedot, are you ready for Squarepusher's weapons of mass disruption? Is your brain fully braced for a sense-blitzing, synapse-snapping, face-melting assault on musical convention? Of course not. The whole point of Tom Jenkinson's ferocious electro-jazz/synth-punk/turbo-glitch maximalism is to blast your mind wide open and blowtorch away all those tedious, restrictive and pointless notions of middlebrow good taste.

Huddled inside a sinister high-tech control booth like some futuristic supervillain, the wild-haired ace of bass triggers relentless volleys of gabba-speed EBM beats, circuit-bending noisecore and reality-rupturing drill 'n' bass, all leavened by some incongruously mellow detours into melodious lounge jazz.

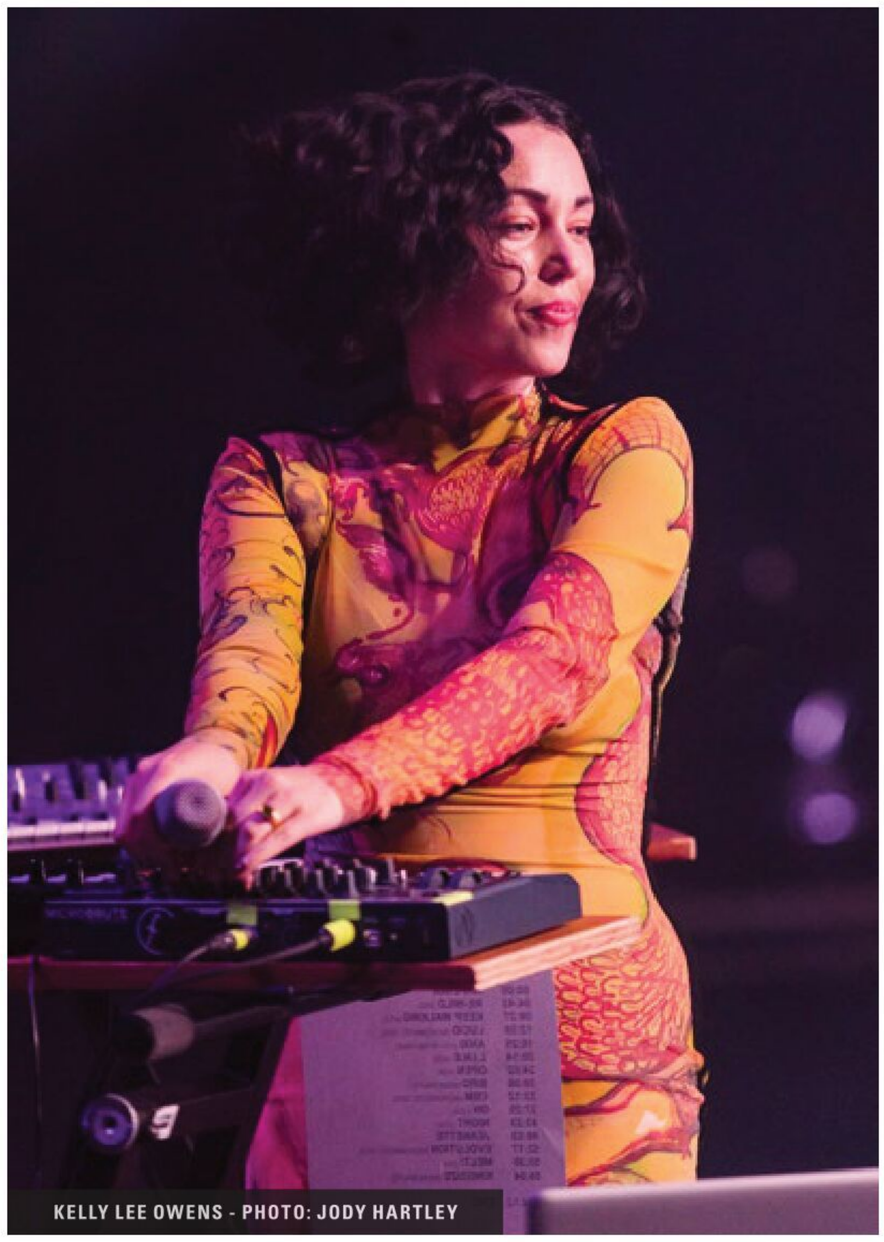
Meanwhile, the piercingly high-resolution video graphics behind him sizzle and implode with retina-scorching intensity. All that is solid melts into air. As usual with Jenkinson, the cumulative effect is both nausea and euphoria, like freebasing an entire century of avant-garde art in one hyper-intense trip. But there is method in his madness – a tight control and a sharp wit that leaves you more exhilarated than exhausted.

A palpable sense of anticipation hangs around Jockstrap, the young, London-based duo whose artfully wonky electropop combines glitchy synth squelches, mangled beats, violin flurries, disorientating samples, oblique nods to hip hop and incongruously fragrant waltz-time reveries.

Taylor Skye and Georgia Ellery (who also plays with Black Country, New Road) fizz with alluring mischief at their well-attended Bluedot set. They're dissonant and abrasive one minute, swooningly romantic the next, often within a few bars of the same tempo-warping track. Ellery's theatrical chanteuse poses and mirthful, surreal, saucy lyrics already feel primed for popstar fame. With a terrific debut album due in September, Jockstrap will soon be playing bigger stages than this, but they effortlessly charm the pants off Bluedot anyway. The only way is up.

The festival's most mainstream headline act this year, Groove Armada, are currently midway through their 25th anniversary tour, which Andy Cato and Tom Findlay are billing as their Elton-style farewell to big live shows.

Their Friday night performance is an impressively slick son et lumière spectacle, complete with blazing lasers and multiple guest vocalists, albeit a little too heavy on facelessly functional dance-pop anthems. A teasingly brief version of their signature chill-out classic 'At The River', with its slow-motion brass swoons and dreamy Patti Page vocal sample, sounds



KELLY LEE OWENS - PHOTO: JODY HARTLEY

BJÖRK - PHOTO: @SANTIAGRAPHY

majestic in its exploded live arrangement, a trippy deconstruction very much in the spirit of Primal Scream's 'Screamadelica'.

In fairness, Groove Armada make an admirable effort in beaming their bespoke video projections onto the Lovell telescope dish, a Bluedot tradition that the GA team fully exploits with busy montages of whirling skulls, shapeshifting band logos and pop art graphics.

The same is true of Saturday headliners Mogwai, who play beneath a humongous circular screen ablaze with kaleidoscopic colour washes and super-sized action paintings. The veteran Glaswegian post-rockers can sometimes lean towards overly tasteful ambient territory, but they bring maximum cinematic melodrama to Bluedot, their brooding instrumental symphonies switching from hushed rumble to thunderous roar in a flashbulb instant.

Commendably, this year's Bluedot has a bumper selection of left-field female electronic artists.

Strutting around the stage in disco dominatrix mode, London-based Nuha Ruby Ra is a blast, blending confrontational performance art with thumping techno-punk.

Fur-coated Berliner Sofia Kourtesis is a great discovery too, pumping out euro-rave anthems underpinned by warm, dubby basslines and impassioned lyrics. These tracks could almost be big-room techno belters but Kourtesis fills them with delightfully eccentric, off-kilter oddness.

Back in 2019, Electronic Sound witnessed a semi-unknown Kelly Lee Owens playing Bluedot. Even then, she seemed to be having the greatest party ever, at least inside her own head, twirling, bouncing and throwing high-energy pop-queen shapes. Three years and two magnificent albums later, the world has caught up with the witchy Welsh techno-hippie diva, who draws a tent-bursting crowd with her shimmering vocals and propulsive, precision-tooled electro bangers.

Playing beneath a screen exploding with dazzling constructivist graphics, Owens injects warm, funny, soulful, sensual charm into machine-made music. Having recently shared her love of gravy, Enya and the wisdom of older relatives with ES, it comes as no surprise to see a twinkly stardust portrait of her nan Jeanette sparkle onscreen during the track of the same name.

"Are you ready to dance with Jeanette?" she beams, fizzing with intent.

Kelly, we were born ready. This is a breathless, pulse-quickening, mood-lifting, gravy-powered performance from a mighty talent.

Can anyone play second billing to Björk without looking pale and amateurish by comparison? Step forward Anna Meredith and her band, whose vivid, richly melodic mash-ups of propulsive electronica with tuba, cello and clobbering percussion work like a treat on the big Bluedot stage.

As usual, Meredith radiates nervy, endearing, self-effacing charm, dropping deadpan quips between stampeding electro-orchestral anthems that seem to rocket skywards in gravity-defying, Escher-like spirals.

"I hope this wasn't a stupid idea," she frowns before signing off with an Elton John medley, maintaining her tradition of ending every show with a novelty cover version. Judging by the warm

HANNAH PEEL - PHOTO: SCOTT SALT

sing-along reaction it inspires, this goofy finale is indeed stupid – delightfully, hilariously stupid.

And so to Björk, who inevitably draws the biggest crowd of the weekend. Wrapped in a puffy, hooded plastic dress by fashion designer Pierpaolo Piccioli, she looks both preposterous and magnificent, like some hallucinatory hybrid creature from an LSD-fuelled body-horror remake of 'Alice In Wonderland'. She is joined by Icelandic conductor Bjarni Frímann Bjarnason (in his chic man-skirt, natch), and the massed strings of Manchester's fabled Hallé Orchestra.

It makes perfect sense that Björk should book the sole UK date of her 'Orkestral' tour at Bluedot, given her science-geek leanings and long history of Mancunian connections. Indeed, she laid the foundations for her post-Sugarcubes solo career here by working with 808 State, and later premiered her hi-tech 'Biophilia' world tour with a residency at the city's Museum Of Science And Industry in 2011 – one of the most jaw-dropping live spectacles this reviewer has ever seen.

Featuring songs from her three-decade solo career reworked into voluptuous string arrangements, all credited to Björk herself, this prom-style performance initially feels remote and underpowered. With no video screens, and no accompanying projections on the Lovell telescope, the visual presentation is unusually tame for such an innovative live performer. But as the set builds, her classic songs blossom and glow. A sweeping 'Isobel', a cascading 'Jóga' and an achingly romantic 'Hyperballad' all sound luminously beautiful, with pizzicato strings replacing programmed beats and synthesised basslines.

Björk barely speaks between tracks, for reasons that only become clear during the encore, when she confesses she caught Covid just days before Bluedot and was unsure if her voice would even function. Happily, aside from a few hiccups and wobbles, those mighty geothermal tonsils sound as potent as ever, a diamond geyser of volcanic emotional force.

"Anyway, fuck Covid!" she concludes. In a winning final twist, she rounds off this easy-listening set with a throbbing orchestral remix of the techno-adjacent stomper 'Pluto' – "Because techno beats deserve it!". Correct.

Not much can top a Björk performance, but Bluedot ends on a deliciously surreal coda. Sheffield's Eccentronic Research Council – aka Adrian Flanagan and Dean Honer (The Moonlandingz, International Teachers of Pop) – are joined by their long-time pal Maxine Peake for a late-night show rooted in their 'Dreamcatcher Tapes' project, a mix of burbling lo-fi electronics and spoken-word monologues relating the dreams and nightmares of various friends, associates, musicians and eccentrics. It's a boozy, woozy, funny, macabre and emphatically northern – what else? – conclusion to a gloriously unique midsummer festival.

As the Bluedot exodus begins, a vague air of melancholy hangs over Jodrell Bank. Parting is such sweet sorrow. But rest assured, we will gather under the stars again next year. Until then, we will always be together in electric dreams.

Tickets for Bluedot 2023 are on sale now at discoverthebluedot.com

CLUB MIX

The 2020 self-titled debut album from Working Men's Club won universal acclaim, but their follow-up, 'Fear Fear', is arguably even better – a glorious collision of "scuffed" electropop, clubby energy and outright bangers. Frontman Syd Minsky-Sargeant reveals its story

WORDS: FAT ROLAND

While we're shopping at an artisan bakery in Todmorden, surrounded by the sweeping greenery of the West Yorkshire valleys, a thought occurs to me. Syd Minsky-Sargeant isn't the rock 'n' roll firestarter I thought he'd be. Sourdough doughnuts, cherry and chocolate brioche swirls, the sound of bleating sheep in a nearby field – it's hardly Keith Moon detonating his drum kit or The Libertines on a 10am bender. And there I was, expecting a teenage tearaway, or at least a tearaway who's just tipped into his 20s, as he releases the tricky follow-up to a critically lauded synthpop debut album.

Lockdown was well underway when his band, Working Men's Club, launched their eponymous 2020 debut on a world in apocalypse mode. With the press hailing its sonic claustrophobia and destructive energy, lead singer Minsky-Sargeant was an instant star, a modern Mark E Smith glaring into the camera in his Adidas top, defiant in rock star shades, jeering shirtless into a microphone in the binary blaze of stage lights.

WMC had already gone through that essential cliche of rock biographies, the acrimonious split, driven by Minsky-Sargeant's realisation that the jangly guitar groove of their debut single 'Bad Blood' was the past, and synths were the future. Exit, stage left, original members Jake Bogacki and Giulia Bonometti. With a new line-up featuring Liam Ogburn, Mairead O'Connor of The Moonlandingz and Drenge's Rob Graham, that first album, although still guitar-driven, now presented the band as a synth-wielding paragon of energetic nu new wave.

Bakery visit done, with banana bread nestled into my bag for later, we wander to Minsky-Sargeant's studio in glorious sunshine, sharing our Covid stories en route. We've both had the bug, we're both triple-jabbed and we're both grateful for coming out the other side. The fact we're doing this interview face-to-face is a privilege not lost on us. When lockdown first hit, WMC were promoting a handful of singles, and Minsky-Sargeant initially saw it as no big deal, at least from a personal point of view.

"I thought it would be three weeks," he says. "I didn't mind it at first because I'd been touring constantly. And then I got quite neurotic. I got stuck in a habit of doing the same things, to the point where I got lazier and lazier. It was quite depressing after a while."

Those groundhog days of lockdown informed the creation of WMC's second album, 'Fear Fear'. With the debut's release pushed back to October 2020 due to the pandemic, and live touring confined to the two-dimensional world of online gigs (or, as he calls it, "livestream bollocks"), Minsky-Sargeant laid down demos for much of 'Fear Fear' before 'Working Men's Club' had even hit the shelves.

"My main focus has always been writing the next thing before the previous one has come out," he says. "And there wasn't anything else to do other than make music."

His deal with Heavenly Recordings had paired him with producer Ross Orton, whose previous noodlings include Add N To (X) and Arctic Monkeys.

Armed with many more songs than they could fit on one long-player, Orton and Minsky-Sargeant embraced a routine, working on track one until it was finished, then track two, track three, and so on. Much more orderly than the instinctive splurge of the debut.

"We stopped at 10," says Minsky-Sargeant. "That was the album – the body of work was complete. The quicker it's made, the quicker it comes out."

And what an album. Post-punk snarls, scuffed electropop, industrial snares and janky big-beat disco. It's Joy Division boogying in The Chemical Brothers' basement. In rock 'n' roll shades. Some of it was a long time in gestation. Breezy pop chugger 'Cut' had been laid down as an instrumental for a year before Minsky-Sargeant added snappy vocals.

"You gotta give it, gotta take it / Gotta break it, gotta make it".

'Widow', the first single, started as a guitar track but was led by Orton in a very Gary Numan-like direction.

"We built this big electronic section and added modular drums, but it no longer fitted with the guitars," admits Minsky-Sargeant. "So we took it back to Ross' house and played all the guitar parts on synths instead. There's, like, 15 synths on that track!"

He has played guitar since he was five years old ("Guitars are right good instruments"), but it's synths that are driving WMC.

"The reason I gravitated towards synths is I could do anything with them," he explains. "A synthesised sound can be anything. They all work with different filter chips, different components, and each has its own character like an old electric guitar."

'Fear Fear' leans heavily on the vintage Roland SH-09, which he calls "a classic Sheffield weapon". He also built his own modular gear, while Ross Orton constructed his Pearl Syncussion drum synth from a kit.

"The Syncussion was a big feature on all the electronic drum sounds," says Minsky-Sargeant. "I wrote a lot on the Juno-106 too, but we replaced it with a Jupiter-6 in Ross' studio because it's a better synth."

The debut album was a collective affair, but because the new long-player was born in the peculiar bubble of a pandemic, everything you hear on it is Minsky-Sargeant. The rest of the band – including Hannah Cobb on synth and guitar, replacing the now-departed Rob Graham – will come on board later for gigging duties. 'Fear Fear' is very much a Working Man's Club of one, albeit with Orton as caretaker.

"For the second record, it was important to be more controlling, to feel that everything was on my terms prior to submitting to the label," says Minsky-Sargeant. "During the pandemic, I could get on with stuff and not have any outside influence."

Ah, the sticky subject of influences. WMC have been compared to New Order, Pet Shop Boys, Depeche Mode, Cabaret Voltaire, Joy Division, The Fall, Echo & The Bunnymen, A Certain Ratio, My Bloody Valentine, The Wedding Present and even bands formed in Minsky-Sargeant's lifetime such as Tame Impala and Sault. He's dismissive of any comparisons because "it's not like I'm on Spotify, picking songs to recreate then changing the melody a bit".

Instead, he references the geography surrounding the studio we're in. Todmorden's converted mills, its shops in former weaving sheds, its bustling markets, fabulous bakeries – I really must eat that banana bread – and the looming Pennines.

"Other than there being a few new houses on the landscape, nothing's really changed around here," he muses. "I made these two records in Sheffield, around the same infrastructure as people like Stephen Mallinder or Ross, who worked in a steel factory after leaving school. All these people come from similar places, which is why maybe things resonate in a similar way. I mean, 30 or 40 years isn't that much time."

Key to the WMC sound is Minsky-Sargeant's voice, which comes across as Mark E Smith fronting 'Wipeout'-era Fluke while haunted by the ghost of Lo Fidelity Allstars. There we go again with the comparisons.

"I do distort my voice to try and make it as aggressive as possible," he admits. "When things are very much electronic, it makes more sense to be atonal. It's supposed to feel intense."

With an aggressive vocal delivery come aggressive lyrics, and the new album is not short of "dark satire", as Minsky-Sargeant calls it. Viz the poetic "A rustic storm beholds me as you quiver and conspire" on the opening track, '19', or the Detroit house glide of 'Ploys' beginning with the brilliantly quilled, "Why would thy care / Thou must just be bluffing". Forsooth!

The lyrics are also a paean to rambling desolation, in both subject matter and form. "Ya ya ya, blah blah blah," sneers the title track, 'Fear Fear'. The previously mentioned 'Widow' has the most entertaining wordage, its chorus expounding on what happens to someone's sex life after losing their partner.

"Lust was easy until you died," goes the song in irresistibly catchy fashion. "Now I fuck inside my head, but not outside."

It was written when Minsky-Sargeant was around 16, so we can assume he didn't have a tranche of deceased spouses from which to draw inspiration. I ask him for more context, but he won't take the bait.

"I don't want to go into specifics because it might devalue the song," he says. "Everything doesn't have to make sense, lyrically. I blur the lines with the melody and the rhythms."

I tell him that pushing back against these sorts of questions is absolutely fine.

"Cheers – they're really good questions," he reassures me. I wonder if he can feel my oncoming sulk as I look down my lyric list…

So, who's the actual woman dressed in black on 'Heart Attack'?

"Doesn't need to be one."

Dammit.

"Keep trying. You've got eight more."

There is a deeper meaning to the lyrics, though. My list – now greased with banana bread – is replete with piss, lust, death, rancidness, nightmares and loneliness. This is a guy who entered adulthood in a world of disease, protest, reactionary politics and police brutality. No wonder he's frustrated.

"You're fed all this jargon about everything being fucked and that we've fucked the planet up to an extent where there's no going back," he rages. "It's all well and good telling us that, but what's the solution? It's as if the Black Lives Matter protests during Covid have sunk into the abyss. It was all very well posting a black square on your Instagram feed, but no one's talking about it now in the same way."

He sees Britain falling backwards as progressive politics are replaced with something darker. All those wider, existential fears added to the more personal worries of day-to-day life that concerned him on the first album. The fear-fear.

"It's going to become harder for the younger generation, but people are becoming more intelligent, thanks to the internet," he reasons. "When writing the lyrics, I was thinking about all those things going on in the world and what part I played – if any at all."

'Angel', the final song on 'Working Men's Club', terminated its colossal 12-minute wig-out with a glorious splash of drums and guitar. That's what earned them the My Bloody Valentine comparison in one live review. 'Fear Fear' chooses a different ending. The appropriately named 'The Last One' finishes its minor-key grump with a rich swell of strings. Actual real strings.

"Getting into a more soundtrack world is something I've been wanting to do for a long time," says Minsky-Sargeant. "I'm definitely going to incorporate that in the future. It's more mature, isn't it? A bit grown-up."

I tell him that's what people do when they want their music to sound more sophisticated as their career progresses. They stick in strings. They also pepper a load of guest vocalists onto their songs, which I suggest he might do for album number three.

"We'll see, we'll see," he replies enigmatically. Meaningful pause. "We'll see."

He'd probably opt for Stephen Mallinder who, in partnership with Benge, remixed Minsky-Sargeant's vocals into a drunken kaleidoscope on WMC's 'John Cooper Clarke' track last year.

"I've worked with Mal on a tune me and Ross did, so I really want to keep working with him," he says. "I'm seeing him this week about a John Grant gig, so that'll be nice. I've been meaning to go to Benge's studio too, but I've been right busy."

Busy with writing even more music. Busy with promotional obligations, including speaking to magazines ("It's the admin part of the job, but I enjoy meeting people because of it. Silver lining."). And busy planning to take an album on tour for the first time. There are gigs booked for Lisbon, London, Leipzig and Leeds. The 'Fear Fear' launch is at Salford's legendary White Hotel, one day before Minsky-Sargeant's 21st birthday.

His challenge now is pimping his closeted studio sessions so they're suitable for a live arena. He's already resolved '19', 'Widow', 'Ploys' and 'Money Is Mine'. And maybe also 'The Last One' – if he can work out how to present the strings.

"I'm looking forward to it," he says. "With the ability to play another album as well as the first record, hopefully it will carry more than it ever did live. It'll be nice to get out of the valley for a while."

I don't know how long banana bread keeps, so I head home to the drizzled towers of Manchester. On the way, I decide that "tearaway" might be appropriate after all. Because with 'Working Men's Club' and 'Fear Fear' as his teenage records, and goodness knows what else to come, I get the sense he's ripping a path into the future.

Soundtracks? Guest vocals? We'll see. Keep an eye out for Syd Minsky-Sargeant, the firestarter, the bakery shopper. That bread was delicious, by the way. "Right tasty", as he might say… an apt description for the pulsating second album from Working Men's Club. Dig in and feel the 'Fear Fear'.

'Fear Fear' is out now on Heavenly Recordings

THE ROAD TO KERNOW

‘Tresor’, the beguiling third album by Welsh artist Gwenno, is a love letter to the language and folklore of Cornwall. Celtic identity, embracing electronics and a mixing desk that once belonged to Martin Hannett all play their part in her colourful journey

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON
PICTURES: CLAIRE MARIE BAILEY

David Bowie once remarked that growing older is “an extraordinary process whereby you become the person you always should have been”. For alt-folkster and pop outsider Gwenno Saunders, the long and winding road to finding her true musical identity has been particularly scenic, from dancing professionally in Las Vegas to acting in soap operas, hosting radio shows, making films, flirting with pop fame and even sharing a stage with Elton John.

More recently, the 41-year-old has made a trio of sublime solo albums in both her mother and father tongues, Welsh and Cornish. Her latest, ‘Tresor’, is a psychogeographical homage to the language, landscape, people and folklore of Cornwall. If it sounds like a homecoming of sorts, that’s because it is, at least on an emotional level.

“I was raised with Celtic mythology above anything else – a Celtic sense of identity within Britain and Ireland,” she explains from her Cardiff home. “I view the world through a Celtic prism, and I feel like the older I get, the more that becomes part of my identity. As you age, you run around less and and start digging deeper into your psyche, and ‘Tresor’ is very much about that – exploring the unconscious collectively and in the individual as well.”

‘Tresor’ is partly a musical and lyrical scrapbook of Gwenno’s visit to St Ives in early 2020, shortly before lockdown began. It follows her acclaimed 2018 album ‘Le Kov’, which was credited by the Cornish Language Board with boosting Cornish language exam entries by 15 per cent and earned her the title Bard of the Gorsedh Kernow, a long-established cultural organisation that seeks to safeguard Cornwall’s Celtic heritage.

On ‘Le Kov’, her use of the Cornish language that she learned from her father, the poet and linguist Tim Saunders, was something of an intellectual statement about the enduring vitality of a minority Brittonic tongue once deemed extinct. With ‘Tresor’, her mission was less cerebral, more personal.

“My intentions were to be driven by emotion and feelings, rather than anything studied,” she says. “I’d got to know Cornwall, I’d got to know people there, so from a songwriting perspective that was the aim of it this time. Also, to capture the emotion and atmosphere of being in St Ives, which was a more physical and immediate experience than a memory passed down. I’m interested in the flexibility and vastness of the Cornish language for expressing lots of different things.”

Recording albums in minority languages that have long been devalued and marginalised by the dominant Anglophone culture may seem like an inherently political act. Gwenno's mother, Lyn Mererid, is a translator and activist who runs a socialist street choir called Côr Cochion Caerdydd, aka Cardiff Reds Choir. But she is wary of her own records being viewed as direct statements.

"I come from a very politicised background, with my mum and everything," she says carefully. "So it's part of my identity to know that there's always class struggle, cultural struggle and power struggle. But, with 'Tresor' particularly, I think what I'm interested in is whether I can create a record that just happens to be in Cornish. Can I create a record where you listen to it and think, 'Ah, that's really beautiful'?

"I create sound because of the nourishment I get from music. So this is all about celebrating music as an inherent part of our human experience – a form that transcends all politics. It is so useful in so many different ways. I can't think of another art form that does what music does in terms of its flexibility of expression."

That said, there is one overtly political song on 'Tresor' – 'NYCAW', a spiky Welsh-language rant based on the slogan, "nid yw Cymru ar werth" ("Wales is not for sale"), the battle cry of a growing protest movement against unaffordable housing and second homes in Wales. But Gwenno insists that even this lyric is much more in the sardonic tradition of post-punk Welsh bands like former John Peel session regulars Datblygu, "self-scrutinising rather than pointing fingers outwards". Treating music as a vehicle for political messages is too reductive, she argues.

"The thing about music is that it's almost a magical thing. It's far more powerful than how it's commodified in capitalist society, so from that point of view, it is political in general. Capitalist societies try to control music, religious societies try to control it and dictatorships try to control it. Music is inherently politicised in any situation because it's so powerful. That's quite an abstract answer, but it's a vast subject."

Although 'Tresor' is awash with indie folk, singer/songwriter sounds, lyre harp chimes and acoustic jangles, Gwenno's sound has always been heavily electronic at heart. With her long-time studio collaborator and life partner Rhys Edwards, she crafts albums DIY-style at home in Cardiff, building tracks from found sounds and tape loops, all filtered through a portable analogue mixing desk that once belonged to legendary Factory Records producer Martin Hannett. For 'Tresor', the duo cite late American songwriter Eden Ahbez and composers Ryuichi Sakamoto and William Basinski as key influences.

"The recording process is very electronic," Gwenno affirms. "That was one reason we wanted to mention those artists, particularly in terms of Basinski for tape loops and, sonically, for the disintegration of sound. Because of the way the project is presented, it's not always clear how electronic it is, but when you make music electronically, it's always a tug of war between the elements. I have the keenest interest in sound, but I'm from the 20th century, so an older analogue time still shapes how I hear and view music."

Gwenno's journey to her current prize-winning electro-bard status has a rich, colourful backstory. Growing up speaking two rare languages, and attending Irish dancing classes from the age of five, she grew accustomed to feeling like a "weirdo" outsider. A "directionless" teenager, she dropped out of sixth form after just two weeks.

"I get bored very easily," she laughs.

But showbusiness came knocking when she auditioned for Irish dance icon Michael Flatley's company, landing roles in his 'Lord Of The Dance' and 'Feet Of Flames' shows. In a bizarre reversal of most musical careers, she started out playing Las Vegas in her teens.

"I was a real troublemaker as a teenager," she reveals. "But I'd been doing Irish dancing since I was little because my dad speaks Irish and we had Irish friends. It was 50p a class every Friday. So then I auditioned in Dublin for 'Lord Of The Dance', and it was a life-saver because I was really not having a good time of it in Cardiff. I was just desperate to escape. I got into the show and was shipped to Las Vegas, which was quite a culture shock. But that was where I first really got into electronic music – there was this great club called Utopia and we'd spend the whole weekend there. A lot of the girls were from Belfast, and they'd been clubbing for years."

Implausibly, dancing in Vegas led Gwenno to the eureka-style epiphany that her eccentric singer/songwriter dreams were actually not so crazy after all. Between shows, she hired a piano and started working on her own music.

"That was quite a big turning point. I was just very bored doing someone else's dances. I was onstage every night thinking, 'I want to say something and I can't!'. So that was where the spark started in terms of how I wanted to express myself musically. Obviously it was a big glitzy show and I felt, 'If this can happen, anything can!'. I was Irish dancing at home and everybody thought I was a weirdo, then all of a sudden it was a career. So I was like, 'Of course I can sing in Welsh and Cornish, because this has happened!'."

Inspired by the growing fame of bands like Catatonia and Super Furry Animals, and the opening of the Welsh Assembly, Gwenno left the bright lights of Las Vegas to return to culturally buzzing Cardiff in the late 1990s.

"All of a sudden, we were part of the world, and that made me want to go home," she recalls. "I was just following my nose. I've never really had a plan, apart from extreme intrigue."

Back in Cardiff, Gwenno amassed a pretty impressive CV for somebody with no career path. Alongside her embryonic forays into Welsh and Cornish-language songwriting, she landed an acting role in the long-running Welsh TV soap, 'Pobol Y Cwm', then on S4C, and later hosted her own show for the same channel.

In 2005, she joined postmodern retro-pop collective The Pipettes, singing lead vocals on their biggest hit, 'Pull Shapes'. Her younger sister Ani, aka Ani Glass, joined the band three years later. With their archly nostalgic riffs on vintage girl-group tropes, The Pipettes were an educational experience for Gwenno, who had been raised largely on Celtic folk music.

"I hadn't been brought up with any of the Anglo-American rock canon," she says. "It wasn't played in my house, so I literally had no idea about any of the bands The Pipettes were referencing. It was like going back to school. It was also quite a nice antidote, because by then everything was so miserable in Wales and The Pipettes were the complete opposite – so frivolous. No integrity, no credibility – it was just about going, 'Fuck it!'."

After the group disbanded in 2011, Gwenno balanced her own musical projects with session work, which is how she ended up playing keyboards on Elton John's 'Good Morning To The Night' – his chart-topping, dance remix collaboration with Australian electropop duo Pnau.

"Through a friend, I was randomly a session keyboard player for Pnau when they were remixing that record," she explains. "I was even onstage with Elton in Ibiza and it was amazing."

Ultimately, however, Gwenno's brief flirtations with mainstream pop taught her that she was not cut out for superficial, tabloid-sized stardom.

"No, because it was quite extrovert, and I'm an introvert," she laughs. "I've realised recently that I'm such a goth!"

There has always been a lush, dreamy and cinematic quality to Gwenno Saunders' music, and never more so than on 'Tresor'. 'Kan Me' is one of the album's most unabashedly lovely tracks. A traditional Cornish "May" song, it was written for Falmouth-based film director Mark Jenkin's terrific new hallucinatory folk-horror, 'Enys Men'.

She and Jenkin are friends, sharing deep roots in the language and folklore of Cornwall. Gwenno has previously performed her own live soundtrack to his feted 2019 debut feature, 'Bait', and recently directed her own short film to accompany 'Tresor', a trippy, costumed pageant featuring regular Jenkin cast member Edward Rowe, aka Cornish comedian The Kernow King.

Gwenno draws deep parallels between Wales and Cornwall, from the shared Celtic cultural heritage to the more current economic struggles. But after 40 years of living in Cardiff, she accepts that her musical sound paintings, depicting her lyrical fatherland, will always be at one remove – love letters filtered through the yearning gaze of an eternal outsider. Never quite feeling at home, she says, is actually a gift for any artist.

"It's almost like there's a window between you and that place," she muses. "Your nose is up against the window, yet it's not your experience. But I'm obsessed with Cornwall – particularly the language. I've always spoken it, and it was like this weight I was carrying around all my life. I always felt, 'What am I supposed to do with it?'.

"So music has helped me work it out because it's not completely alien. It *is* mine, but it isn't geographically mine. To be honest, there's something about how it makes me feel like 'the other' that I enjoy, because feeling like I'm on the outside helps me to see things better. As an artist observing from afar, having distance is quite a good way of analysing a situation. So that's part of it. Being on the outside, being the oddity. I've always felt like that anyway."

'Tresor' is out now on Heavenly Recordings

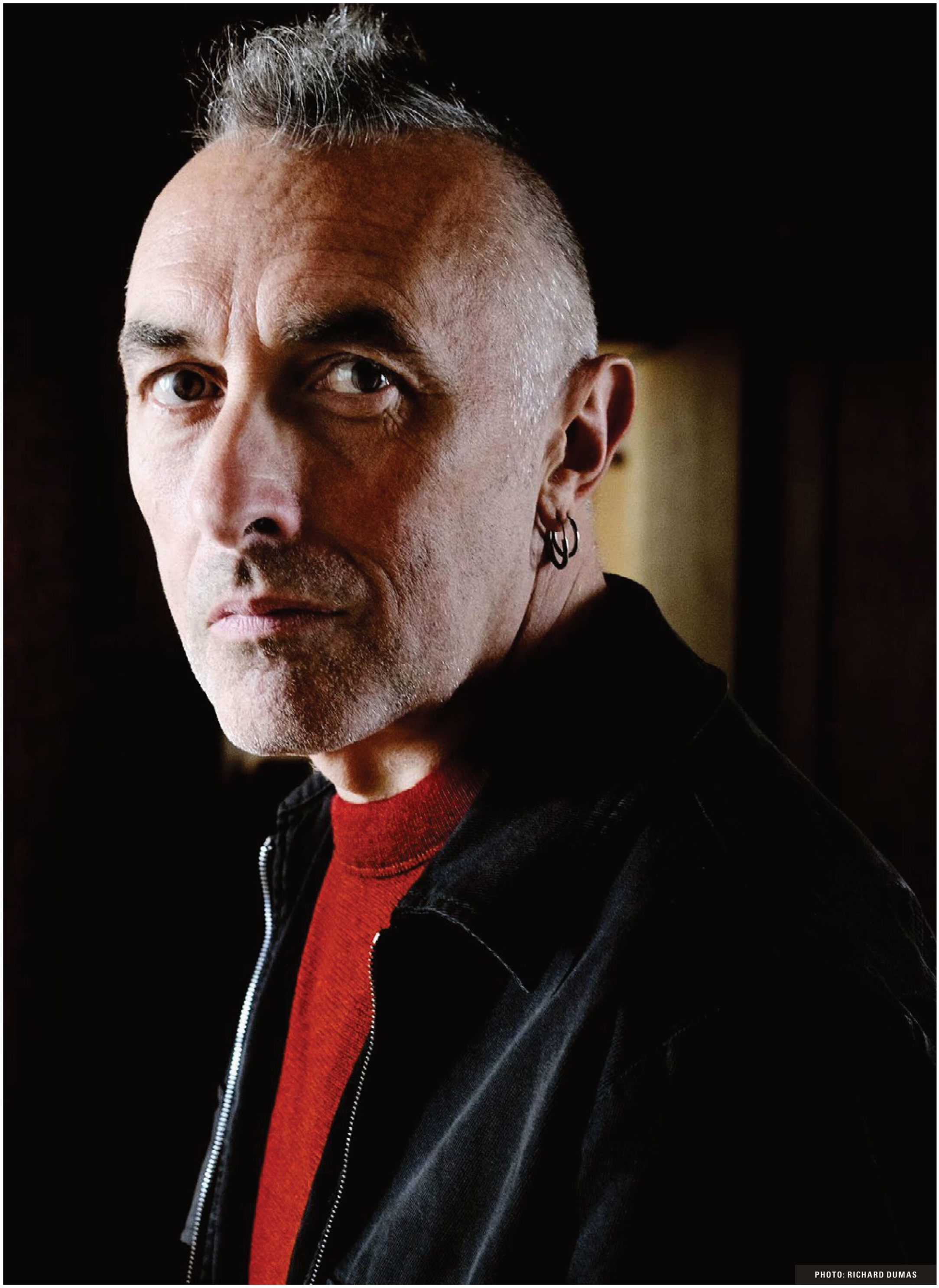


PHOTO: RICHARD DUMAS

GO FIGURE

More absorbed than ever in electronics, Yann Tiersen's latest album '11 5 18 2 5 18' finds the Breton composer sampling and resampling old tracks into compelling, exquisitely wrought fresh shapes... with an occasional nod to the dancefloor. Who knew?

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

Electronic music has always been important to Yann Tiersen, even when it was well hidden in his work. So while it might look like it's taken a lifetime for the Breton to become a fully fledged electronic musician, it's more a case of coming full circle.

For '11 5 18 2 5 18', his wonderfully expansive new album, Tiersen finally indulges his propensity for modular synthesisers and sampling, which has played a more important role in his musical development than you might have realised. But there's no hint of a dilettantish, fly-by-night producer on the make with this, his 12th studio long-player. It's a textured, multi-layered and accomplished work, featuring nine progressive tracks infused with waves of emotion, set against brutal, austere soundscapes.

Its backstory should start by addressing the misconceptions around Tiersen's public image. The 52-year-old has been making records for nearly 30 years, with a discography as varied and experimental as you could hope for, from post-rock to orchestral, field recordings to freak-folk. But it's for 2001's award-winning soundtrack to 'Amélie', Jean-Pierre Jeunet's mischievous Paris romance, that he became globally famous. A blessing and a curse for Tiersen himself, it could be the éléphant in the room.

"It's not a very good movie," he says bluntly, speaking from his dressing room in Detroit, where he's in the middle of a North American tour. "It's not my type of film. And I don't like to be associated with that kind of Parisian folklore and the vulgarity of it. I sometimes think it's annoying, although now I don't really care."

'Amélie' raised Tiersen's profile and afforded him the luxury of creating meaningful works, often from the margins. It also helped him to buy an old nightclub on Ushant – a small island in the Celtic Sea off the west coast of Brittany, where he's lived since 2000 – and build The Eskal, an impressive three-studio recording facility. But the film has also led to false impressions about what he is as a musician, and even what he represents and where he's from. An advocate of Brittonic languages, with forthright separatist views, Tiersen considers himself neither a soundtrack composer nor even particularly French.

"I only ever did one soundtrack in my life!" he says. "OK, I did one for 'Good Bye Lenin!' and one for a documentary about the sailor Éric Tabarly. But that's it."

The music for 'Amélie' was purloined from Tiersen's first three albums – 1995's 'La Valse Des Monstres', 1996's 'Rue Des Cascades' and 1998's breakthrough, 'Le Phare', inspired by Ushant's Créac'h, the most powerful lighthouse in Europe. Instrumentals such as 'La Noyée' – written to commemorate Alice Reed, one of 250 people who drowned when the SS Drummond Castle sank in treacherous waters near the island a century before – were reappropriated and stripped of their intended meaning.

Moreover, the relative distance between him writing those tracks and the success of 'Amélie' meant he had already moved on by the time the movie became a huge hit around the world. Tiersen's 2001 album, 'L'Absente', was a dreamy work featuring a variety of strange instruments and sounds, including an old-fashioned typewriter, but that didn't stop him from getting dragged into what the French press called the "nouvelle chanson" movement, while the international inkies assumed he was a film composer.

"I'm not!" he says, still somewhat amused by this notion. "Actually, I'm really bad at doing soundtracks. I don't like the process because, for me, music is something really abstract – it's about meditation, trance, dance. I think it's impossible to make music based on images or a story. So I have always been really uncomfortable with that label."

Born in Brest, north-west France in 1970, Tiersen was playing the piano at the age of four and the violin at six. Yet, although he was classically trained at several conservatoires, most notably Rennes, where he spent much of his childhood and adolescence, his real musical education came from the city's vibrant indie scene. For many years, Rennes has hosted Transmusicales, one of Europe's premier showcase festivals, so the young Tiersen got to see the likes of Nirvana, Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, Einstürzende Neubauten and many more.

"Transmusicales was just great and it still is," he says. "And there were two or three really good gigs a week with incredible bands from all over the world. So yeah, I was really lucky to have my teenage years there."

By the time he was 13, Tiersen's violin wasn't sitting well with his burgeoning hardcore credentials, so he smashed it up, took up guitar and put together a rock band. When the band split a few years later, he decided to dispense with musicians altogether. Armed with a Roland Juno-106 and a Korg DSS-1 sampler – his first synths – and an old Uher 4000 open-reel magnetic tape recorder, he started making music with samples, something he would return to in later life.

"Sampling has always been really important to me," he says. "It changed my way of seeing and doing music. People say, 'You play a lot of instruments'. But no, not really – I use a lot of them because I started with sampling and it opened up all these possibilities of sound."

Then in the early 1990s, Tiersen repaired his violin and set off on a whole different trajectory.

"I don't know why I did it," he laughs. "But I guess I was fascinated by repetitive music… Neu!, Steve Reich and minimalism. I was discovering all of that. So that was when I started thinking about acoustic instruments again. I began to mix toy pianos with harpsichords, pianos and accordions to make repetitive patterns. I remember in those early days, playing a festival in Nantes in this really big room in a warehouse. I was opening for Charlemagne Palestine, and that night was so good."

All of this sonic experimentation and hobnobbing with legendary New York minimalists is a far cry from the perception of Tiersen as a purveyor of bal-musette accordion, playing in the streets of Montmartre for his supper.

"I was using accordion with a sense of humour, like the Penguin Cafe Orchestra or something," he reasons. "It's been a big misunderstanding over the years, for sure. We once had this really posh woman complaining at the merchandise table, asking, 'Where's Yann Tiersen? This group is far too noisy!'. The guy at the merch table said, 'That's him onstage'. And she said, 'No, my husband says it's not him!', which was funny…"

The reception so far on his solo tour across the US has been wholly welcoming and positive, with no reported incidents of posh women complaining about awful dins. Tiersen looks relaxed today too, talking ahead of his soundcheck at the Crofoot Ballroom in Pontiac, Detroit. As the birthplace of techno, it's an appropriate setting to discuss an electronic record that is more likely to make you want to dance yourself sweaty than purchase a dainty mille-feuille and people-watch from a pavement cafe. '11 5 18 2 5 18' represents a rebirth of sorts, though the ruggedness he evokes in so much of his oeuvre is ever-present.

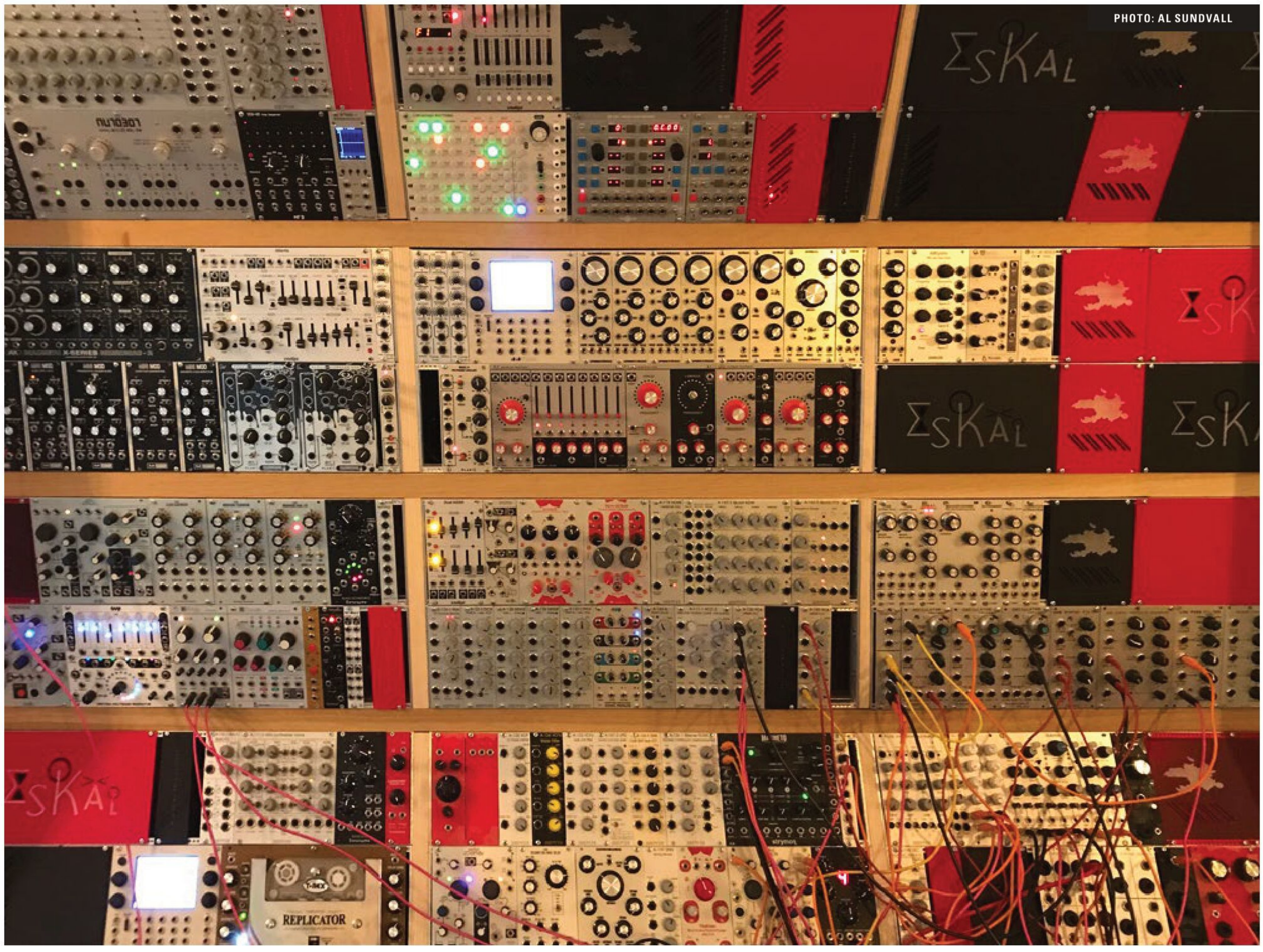


PHOTO: AL SUNDVALL

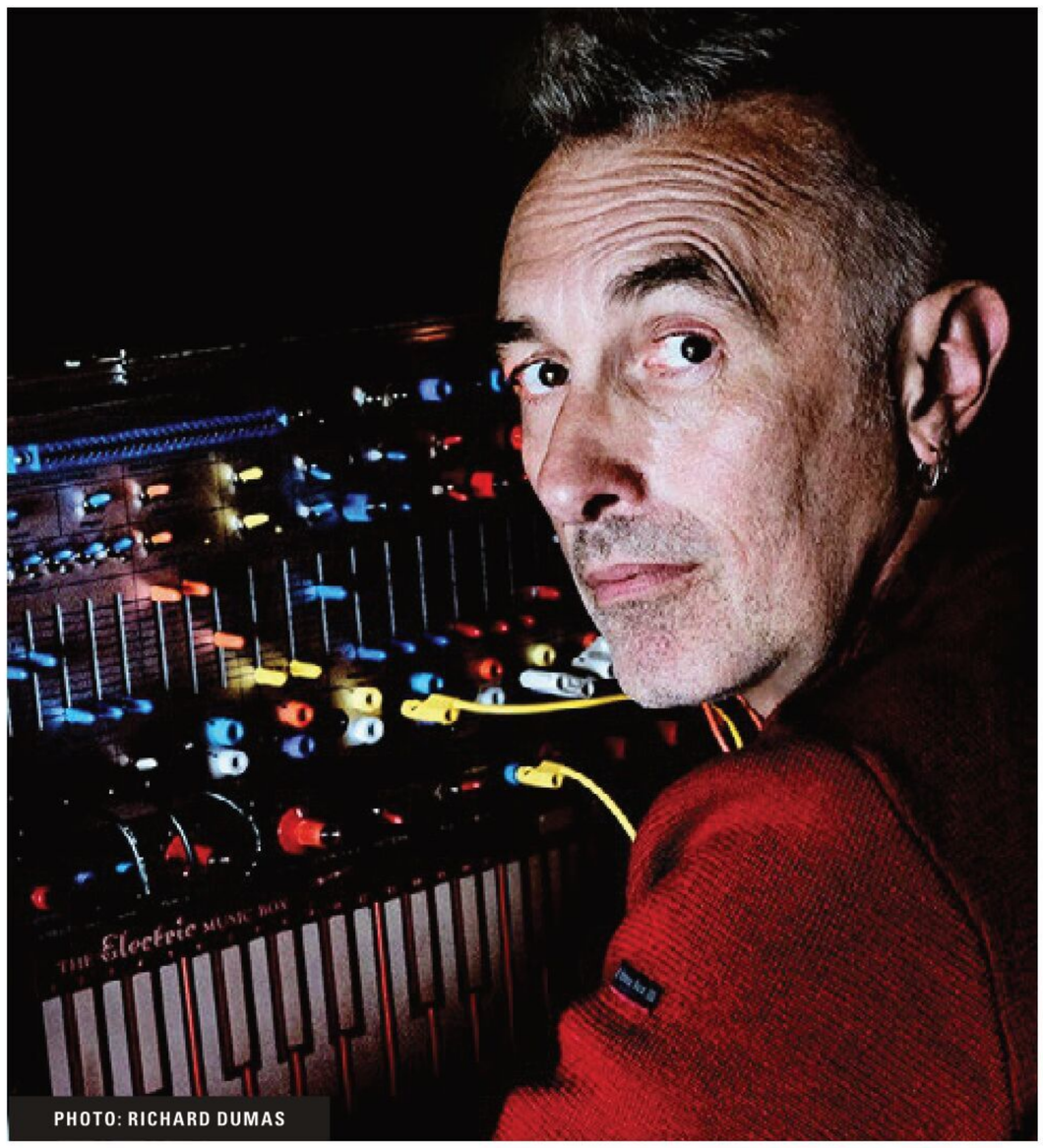


PHOTO: RICHARD DUMAS

At first glance, the numerical album title looks like it could have been plucked from the dystopian pages of Huxley or an early George Lucas film – at least, that is, until you crack the code. Each number represents a letter of the alphabet, from 1 for A to 26 for Z. Tiersen kept this information out of the original press release to maintain an air of mystery. The dactylonomists among you, though, will already have worked out that '11 5 18 2 5 18' translates as 'Kerber', the name of Tiersen's acclaimed 2021 album – a piano-led, classical crossover that integrates experimental electronics into its sound tapestries in a surprisingly ingenious and cohesive way.

But that doesn't make '11 5 18 2 5 18' strictly a remix record. For one thing, some of the tracks hark back to earlier moments in Tiersen's catalogue. The final track, '13 1 18 25 (6 5 1 20. 17 21 9 14 17 21 9 19)', is based on 'Mary', originally recorded with Elizabeth Fraser for 2005's 'Les Retrouvailles' and now featuring his wife, Emilie Quinquis. 'Palestine' ('16 1 12 5 19 20 9 14 5'), meanwhile, was harvested from 2010's 'Dust Lane', Tiersen's first album on Mute, which was his first to fully incorporate synthesisers.

And perhaps even more importantly, each track begins with a short sample or two taken from its root counterpart, before being developed into something completely unrecognisable and unmistakably sonic – more stem-cell technology than counterfeiting originals.

Tiersen fell in love with modular synths in 2009, on a visit to Berlin's famous SchneidersLaden synth shop to sort out equipment problems ahead of a gig in the city. This resulted in the start of his relationship both with the instruments and with the shop's owner (and Superbooth synth festival host), Andreas Schneider. These bits of kit undoubtedly suit Tiersen's music, and they seem to have a hold on him too. At times, he's almost evangelical about their functionality and the strange forces they exude.

"There's an organic thing with electronic music that goes much deeper than with acoustic instruments," he muses. "It has something to do with nature – it's a holistic thing where everything is possible with electricity. You can try to master it, but you can't really. Whereas acoustic instruments are human inventions – especially the piano, which is maybe the extreme Western monster. What you can do with it is kind of narrow. You're not free with this kind of instrument – you need to practise a lot, and it's a bit square. Electronic instruments are infinite. As I get older, with them I can go deeper into whatever I want to achieve."

Which leads us nicely back to the genesis of '11 5 18 2 5 18'. After lockdown, Tiersen suddenly realised something while working on an upcoming Keeley Forsyth remix.

"We'd had two years of the pandemic, then the war in Ukraine started, and it was all too much," he reflects. "I felt really, really bad about it – it's horrible. So I was doing Keeley's remix, and it sounds crazy because I was just using patches on the modular, but when I'm listening to it now, I can hear and feel all the anxiety I had at that time. It went through the synths and the patches. That's amazing, and I do believe that when you're comfortable with electronic instruments, it's like an extension of your nervous system and brain. I've never achieved that with acoustic instruments."

He started thinking about his own work and how he could manipulate and augment it, and then came the invite to play Superbooth 2022… and the idea for the new album was born. It wouldn't be the first time he'd taken his songs and reinterpreted them electronically for a live audience, although the process would be different to that employed by his short-lived modular synth group with Lionel Laquerrière and Thomas Poli. Under the name of Elektronische Staubband, they'd performed new renditions of tracks at the La Route Du Rock festival in 2012, including 'Palestine', and even released an album as the abbreviated ESB via Bureau B in 2015.

Tiersen says he feels blessed to have worked with both Mute's Daniel Miller and Tapete's Gunther Buskies, two of the most electronically-oriented and nurturing label bosses in the business, although the complete answer as to why it has taken such a long time to produce an album like '11 5 18 2 5 18' still evades him.

"Yeah, it's really weird because I have always loved these machines," he says. "Even if you had come to my studio back in 2000, I had more synths than other instruments – some guitars, but lots of synths. I've always been obsessed with them, but I didn't use them that much for a while. I don't know why… I think I was a bit intimidated. Maybe I felt I wasn't mature enough. It has been a really slow, drawn-out process to be able to express myself with a full electronic set-up. But I'm here now, and it's good."

'11 5 18 2 5 18' is out now on Mute

Inspired by female philosophers, mystics and poets, ‘Spirit Exit’ – the new album by Italian composer Caterina Barbieri – is a modular synth fantasy, billed as her most profound work to date. Strap yourselves in for a cosmic journey...

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS
PICTURES: JIM C NEDD

MOTHER UNIVERSE

CATERINA BARBIERI

It feels apt that Caterina Barbieri is cruising at 30,000 feet "on an aeroplane with a gorgeous sea of blinding clouds right beyond my window". Just like the sensation of flying high, the Italian composer's music has a uniquely transcendental quality, seeming to exist in some liminal place between the earthly realm and the heavens.

Her latest album, 'Spirit Exit', features a track called 'Life At Altitude'. A soaring, spiralling piece, it exemplifies the web-like arrangements of the modular synth artist, its unfurling arpeggios rippling with the intense rush of a jet engine. Barbieri is responding via email from a flight to Lithuania, where she's playing at a festival, but when 'Spirit Exit' was written, her world felt decidedly smaller and more limited.

"I composed most of it during the first lockdown of 2020 at my home studio in Milan," she explains, "when the city was one of the darkest hotspots of the pandemic. Framed, forbidden, filtered spaces – windows, gates, walls and doors – these are the physical and psychological spaces I inhabited during the composition of this album."

Whereas her previous long-players were conceived more as live-based works, capturing snapshots of continually evolving pieces, 'Spirit Exit' is the first to be entirely written and recorded in the studio.

"During this time of extreme self-isolation, music became for me like a way of escaping a state of confinement and sensorial deprivation," she says. "It was the only way to travel in time and space when movement in the outside world wasn't possible."

This period of enforced solitude saw Barbieri turn towards female mystics, philosophers and poets for inspiration.

"I thought about the spatial dimension of confinement as a strong archetype of the female condition in the past, and how it shaped the mystical vein of female thought," she says. "Women often lived segregated lives, observing the world from a window, a gate, a filter. As they couldn't freely move outside, they would redirect their own energy towards their inner world.

"The friction between the constriction of their physical lives and the cosmic freedom of the inner world and power of the mind is at the very root of visionary female thinking. It's pioneering, feminist sci-fi."

The 16th century Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun and author St Teresa D'Avila's idea of the "interior castle" – a metaphor for inner, spiritual realms – particularly resonated with Barbieri.

"In a way, it's not a 'real' space – it's a space of the mind," she says. "This is quite different to my previous music, which was mostly composed while touring, when I was in connection with the spaces and physicality of live performances."

The metaphysical work of Emily Dickinson also fed into Barbieri's vision for 'Spirit Exit'. The American poet spent most of her life in seclusion and conducted relationships with friends mainly by correspondence. Both her letters and unconventionally structured poems often focus presciently on death, immortality and the immense universe. There's an obvious link between her cosmic meditations and the existential themes that underpin Barbieri's otherworldly sonic structures.

"I have so many favourites from her," enthuses Barbieri. "But I especially love her visionary extracorporeal and extraterrestrial poems that make her a pioneer of science fiction literature. A stunning example of this is 'I Saw No Way – The Heavens Were Stitched'."

She goes on to write out the poem's brief but arresting lines.

"I saw no Way — The Heavens were stitched — / I felt the Columns close — / The Earth reversed her Hemispheres — / I touched the Universe — / And back it slid — and I alone — / A Speck upon a Ball — / Went out upon Circumference — / Beyond the Dip of Bell — "

There's something beautifully synchronistic about Barbieri powering through the skies, herself "a speck upon a ball", invoking the poetry of a like-minded artist some 200 years antecedent. The title, 'Spirit Exit', suggests a contemplation on life after death. What are her thoughts on the afterlife?

"It's the first time I've reflected on death in an album," she admits. "I think it's something related to the extreme darkness and sensory deprivation of the first lockdown. The title itself refers to the idea of music as a portal to transcend physicality and explore out-of-body experiences.

"On this album, I feel that the gravity of death and the gravity of life coexist like two magnets. One cannot exist without the other. This came as a realisation when I composed the last track, 'The Landscape Listens', which is the slower, darker version of the opening track 'At Your Gamut' – its brighter, faster twin.

"The two tracks coexist like shadow and light, both equally imbued with a sense of birth and death. Perhaps, from a wider perspective, birth and death are just illusions, concepts in our minds. Everything dies and renews itself all the time. Perhaps birth and death are just sacred doors through which we pass on our journey."

Since 'Patterns Of Consciousness', her 2017 breakthrough album, Barbieri's name has become synonymous with modular synthesisers. Her 2014 debut long-player, 'Vertical', was composed for vocals and the Buchla 200, the instrument that kick-started her fascination with hardware. Yet before she became immersed in the world of minimal yet complex electronic arrangements, she studied electroacoustic composition and classical guitar at the Bologna Conservatory. What drew her to classical guitar initially?

"I think the sound of it," she responds. "It was very sensual, fragile and ephemeral, ineffable. There was warmth and sadness – a timeless beauty. When I started playing guitar, I liked how expressive and sensitive it was as an instrument. Creativity is often inspired by limitations, and I've always been fascinated by the techniques used in classical guitar to overcome the instrument's limitations, especially with its fast-decaying timbres and lack of harmonic sustain.

"This type of compositional design definitely had a huge impact on my way of working with modulars too – using fast, interlocked patterns as well as upper harmonics and delays to expand the potential of a monophonic oscillator voice. I think my practice on guitar gave me an affection towards minimalism and the desire to transcend it at the same time."

Going back to her first memories of music, Barbieri remembers the Monteverdi opera 'L'Orfeo' playing at home when she was four or five years old, as well as "early memories of my grandma singing Italian opera, mostly the epic and dramatic stuff by Puccini".

This exposure to Baroque music has filtered into what could be described as a recurring texture on her albums, from 'Patterns Of Consciousness' and the medieval-style compositions on 2019's 'Ecstatic Computation', to the angelic vocal choirs on 'Fantas Variations' – her "remix"album, released last year – and through to the harpsichord-sounding tones that resurface throughout 'Spirit Exit'.

Discovering a Terry Riley CD among her father's collection also marked a kind of lightbulb moment, with Barbieri making her first connection between minimalist and electronic music.

"My dad used to put on a lot of records at home, and I remember these joyful moments of listening to music with my family," she says. "I think this made me identify music as salvation at a very early age. As a kid, I always found music a shelter – a place to heal and process sad, difficult feelings into something else.

"I was transfixed by Riley's 'A Rainbow In Curved Air'. Later, I started getting more and more into avant-garde music with a preference for noise, computer music and the more abstract fringes of metal, like doom and drone. A lot of Keiji Haino, Sunn O))), Pan Sonic, Autechre and My Bloody Valentine."

And is there an all-time favourite, a particular song or piece of music that always evokes a strong emotional response in her?

"'Earth People' by Ramases," she replies, namechecking the British psychedelic musician and his cult 1971 album, 'Space Hymns'.

These are Barbieri's musical touchstones, but the truth is that her own compositions sound like they radiate from some far-off galaxy, standing apart from anything that has come before.

As a modular synth virtuoso with a classical background and a keen understanding of psychoacoustics – how we perceive various sounds – Barbieri is an advocate of what she has previously described as "molecular listening – an eternal dance of atoms".

"Although my music has become a bit more arranged over time, I still try to keep the identification of the sound source a bit blurred, avoiding those iconic timbres that are instantly recognisable and deeply embedded in our listening culture," she explains. "When listeners fail to grasp the source behind a sound, they start engaging with a more active, deep kind of listening, where the music creates a pause in time and space."

She continues to evolve this singular sound world on 'Spirit Exit', adding strings, guitar and voice to her stunning synth arrangements. What made this the right moment to expand her sonic palette?

"Peter Rehberg used to say computer music stopped being interesting when laptops stopped crashing," she writes, indicating laughter. "I agree. The best music happens when you don't know exactly what you're doing. When you know your system too well and start mastering your practice, things get too polished and boring.

"After 'Ecstatic Computation', I felt I'd reached this limit with my modular set-up and I had the urge to expand into new directions. I started adding more instruments, including guitar, piano, strings and my voice, while keeping the generative writing technique on modular hardware at the heart of my creative process. The resulting sonic universe of this album is much wider, a bit more generous and maximalist in arrangements."

And how do you feel about singing and bringing your own vocals more prominently into your work?

"It took me a long time to fully accept and embrace the vulnerability that comes with using your own voice," she replies. "I like how synthesisers can distillate emotions into something 'other' or 'alien' – bypassing the intrinsically personal, vulnerable element of the human voice. At the same time, vocals are a way to inject more human energy into the pretty algid, mechanic aspect of my work with technology.

"A new addition to my set-up for 'Spirit Exit' is a sampler that I used for resampling modular sounds and voice to rearrange them into new forms. It's the very first time I've worked with samplers, as their aesthetic is quite distant from the generative, real-time synthesis at the core of my work. But it's been a lot of fun. It's a new territory I'd like to explore more in the future."

Outside music, Barbieri enjoys cycling, gardening and reading – activities that inspire her creativity and feed back into her artistic process. In fact, if she wasn't making music, she'd like to be doing architecture or garden design – architecture and space are inherently tied to the development of her compositions and her live performances.

"I like reverberant spaces because they become active parts of the music, often adding unexpected magic to the performance," she says. "Kraftwerk Berlin is my favourite venue in the world, and playing there at an early stage in my career deeply influenced my music and how I play live with patterns and delays.

"Reflections on walls can add new layers of time to the music, like a hidden, secret score you can interact with. I love to hear the decay of sound in spaces, the natural delays added by the architecture of a venue. You really notice it when you work with isolated, sharp melodic gestures. I love it when music brings spaces to life and vice versa.

"This simple interaction between music and space is as old as time and at the root of every musical tradition. One of the most obvious examples is how the architecture of churches has inspired the development of polyphonic music in Western culture."

'Spirit Exit' certainly has a divine quality, from the heavenly synth progression of the epic, 10-minute-long 'Knot Of Spirit (Synth Version)' to the processed, exultant vocals of 'Broken Melody'. Immensely transformative, this powerful album is an intimate look into Barbieri's relationship with spirituality and humanity, the sound of an artist ascending towards some higher plane.

"I do feel I have a spiritual connection to music and the machines I use to compose it," she agrees. "I often think of them as oracles. I believe music is a deeply transformative experience and a way to cultivate spirituality. In sound, we are carried outside of our individual physicality, becoming more present and receptive to what is happening around us. We can embrace a larger, even cosmic perspective that goes beyond the human and the terrestrial.

"I don't perceive this spiritual quality of music in religious terms, though. For me, music is radical imminence – it teaches us how to be in the here and now. It's a way to feel a communion with the continuous transformation of life, matter and its cosmic resonance in a vitalistic, post-human perspective."

We can't know where the spirit goes, but as Caterina Barbieri's music continues to stretch towards new dimensions, the journey feels every bit as thrilling and blissful as the possible destination.

'Spirit Exit' is out now on Light-Years

RAVE NEW WORLD

ORBITAL

30 Something

LONDON

Thirty-something years ago, the thing that routinely disrupted the nascent British dance music scene was the police force, tasked with breaking up the indomitable illegal raves which were springing up each weekend in fields around the M25 – the orbital motorway that encircles London. Fast-forward 30-odd years and it was a global pandemic that brought dance music to a juddering halt and, with it, Phil and Paul Hartnoll's planned celebration of three decades of activity.

Orbital were formed in Otford, Kent in South East England in 1989. The brothers Hartnoll named their project after the motorway that Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman described in their 1990 novel 'Good Omens' as "evidence for the hidden hand of Satan in the affairs of Man", thus explaining the traffic – and possibly the white-hot, druggy debauchery of rave culture. More on the devil shortly. Let's not rush this.

Orbital's early years feel like they were ripped off by JK Rowling for 'Harry Potter' – their first tracks, including the epoch-defining 'Chime', were recorded in a cupboard under the stairs. Utterly magical they were too, in spite of the Hartnolls' paucity of kit at the time. Like Potter, Orbital came into their own a few years later in a field – not with Quidditch, thankfully, but as consistent crowd-pleasers at successive Glastonbury festivals. You'd catch them, poised over their equipment with trademark headset lights, looking not unlike the Mitchell brothers trying to crack a safe.

On this new collection, Orbital really do feel like one of a handful of dance acts that broke the mould. Those live performances, and where they took well-known tracks like 'Impact (The Earth Is Burning)' as source material to improvise around, were unheard of in a scene dominated by DJs. Early on, their approach rapidly moved from dependable 12-inch, club-friendly releases to long-players that carried more than a heady whiff of 1970s concept albums in their scope, samples and sequencing.

Dance music had metamorphosised again by the time the Hartnolls released 1994's 'Snivilisation', a cynical, punk-art riposte to the scene they had helped create, without heading too far into fractal, Autechre-esque territory. Like The Orb's 'Pomme Fritz', released the same year to similarly quizzical responses, 'Snivilisation' felt almost like a ready-made surrealist sculpture. It nevertheless served a purpose in allowing the brothers to refocus and avoid any notion of predictability. Its follow-up, 1996's 'In Sides', was a masterpiece of epic proportions, yielding the jaw-dropping haunted synths and restless drum 'n' bass shapes of 'The Box'. From there, it was a short hop to soundtracks and performing with the voice of the late Stephen Hawking at 2012's Paralympic Games in London. Not a bad journey from the broom cupboard of rave, all told.

You get a taste of their early progressions on '30 Something'. More akin to those essential live sets, the album finds Orbital reverently revisiting their most celebrated moments. These aren't re-rubs – for that, you want the accompanying suite of mixes from the likes of Logic 1000, ANNA, Jon Hopkins and David Holmes – but delicate, respectful updates. The new version of 'Impact' – whose urgent climate message existed in a dissonant post-Body Shop, pre-Greta Thunberg environmentalist void, and now appears here with the extended title '30 Years Later And The Earth Is Still Burning Mix' – is more fierce, insistent and intense than it ever has been, and with good reason. The new forms of 'Halcyon' and 'Belfast' preserve their uncertain, muted euphoria but isolate a certain stately, neoclassical grandiosity that seemed hidden in their original guises.

But it's the version of 1991's 'Satan', commencing with its unlikely (yet brilliant) sample of Butthole Surfers' 'Sweat Loaf', that stands out. Always a relatively punishing listen, the new track has a jacking, uninterruptible rhythm and an ominous sense of menace and exigency. Heard during an era of brutal, shocking and unbelievable world events, 'Satan' now feels all the more essential. The updated track quickly shifts from that comedic snatch of lysergic Buttholes nonsense to something more sinister, its relentless, propulsive shapes suggesting that the metaphorical focal point is omniscient in our world and lives today.

A straightforward 'best of' would have been easy, but Orbital have never – thankfully – embraced easy. The legacy of Phil and Paul Hartnoll is one that deserves a different sort of celebration. To riff on their own material without once seeking to improve or change the moments that are like electronic music's Beatles songbook, and yet deliver something fresh, contemporary and of the moment, is what they've always done better than most. Rave on (and on and on), people.

MAT SMITH

THE BACK

A LILY
Nocturne Thunder
BYTES

The solo project of Brighton's James Vella, A Lily's sixth album is a real thing of beauty. Constructed live via a single performance of electronic loops and layers, the celestial, ambient-ish pulses on 'Nocturne Thunder' really get under your skin. The aroma of rain on warm ground after dark is almost palpable, while titles such as 'To Seek Ecstasy In The Dawn' and 'Like A Hymn' tell you all you need to know. Fans of Oneohtrix Point Never's future-facing elegies will certainly find lots to love here. **VI**

CIRCUIT3
Technology For The Youth
ANALOGUE TRASH

For his third Circuit3 album, Dublin's Peter Fitzpatrick gazes lovingly back on a childhood spent watching the televised Apollo rocket launches and dreaming of going into space. Those memories are then filtered through contemporary reflections on politics and science, giving 'Technology For The Youth' a sense of thwarted melancholy. The brilliant retro-futurist, orbiting synths of '50 Years Ago' find Fitzpatrick working his inner Midge Ure, with lyrics suggesting how little we've travelled (metaphorically) since the first moon landing. Evocative electronic music for stolen futures. **MS**

BAND OF CLOUD
This Is Tomorrow
CASTLES IN SPACE

The forecast? It's Whitby, so gothic spells with outbreaks of gloomy folk. Thankfully, David Owen and Rebecca Denniff are here with this little ray of electronic sunshine. Owen was once frontman with 1990s NME faves The Hollow Men, but there's nothing of his indie guitar heritage here. The Orb-esque opener 'Band Of Cloud' floats softly around Denniff's hypnotic vocals, while 'Night Visiting Song' is beautifully hypnopompic, sweetened by the tinkling of subliminal harps. And the closing title track is a cool deluge of beats and cut-up blipverts. Music for meteorologists. **BF**

ANGELO HARMSWORTH
Vent
ENMOSSED

The latest album by Berlin-based producer Angelo Harmsworth attains the high standard set by the Enmossed and Psychic Liberation tape series – balancing sonic gravitas with intriguing inspirational concept. The listener is thrust from their seat-edge into a world both discomforting and tough to leave, as 'Vent' veers from outright distortion to swathes of "spectral beauty". If sedate ambient tones bore you, dive into the closing track 'Hands Like Vapour' – all experimental sound design and journeying narrative. Complex, but captivating. **FH**

KYLE KIDD
Soothsayer
AMERICAN DREAMS

Cleveland vocalist Kyle Kidd turned heads through their critically acclaimed work with experimental collective Mourning [A] BLKstar, yet little could have prepared us for 'Soothsayer', their special solo debut. Like soul music from the future, Kidd's mighty vocal cords are backed by a super-troupe of 11 Ohio musicians, and they cut a majestic figure on the trip hop-esque lead single 'Scars Alight', or on the midnight evocations of 'TMS', where they wail over a slow house beat, "I'm living in the moment / I'm living forever". I concur – both Kidd's present and future are glowing. **ILS**

WE BE ECHO
Ceza Evi
COLD SPRING

Unfettered, unafraid and sometimes unhinged, 'Ceza Evi' was originally released on cassette in 1983. The debut release from We Be Echo, aka UK lo-fi producer Kevin Thorne, has now been remastered and repackaged as a double CD set so it can be appreciated in its full oppressive glory. With their vocal samples and hypnotic synthesiser rhythms, tracks like 'Punish You' and 'I Do' benefit the most from this treatment, while the raw spontaneity of 'Inside Life's Wire', featuring Throbbing Gristle's Genesis P-Orridge, serves as a reminder of the roots of industrial music. Uncompromising stuff. **IB**

GALYA BISENGALIEVA
Hold Your Breath: The Ice Dive
ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT

Kazakh-British composer Galya Bisengalieva made waves with two EPs on her own Nomad Music Productions label, and then with her 2020 debut album 'Aralkum' on One Little Independent. She's collaborated with Steve Reich, Suzanne Ciani, Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley, Mica Levi and Radiohead, and now comes this official soundtrack to a documentary concerned with environmental issues – a central theme of her own work. Immersive tracks such as 'Elina's Fears' and 'Melting Ice' beautifully storyboard the titular film, but also stand on their own as life-affirming ambient pieces. **JA**

ISA GORDON
For You Only
OPTIMO MUSIC

Glasgow-based Isa Gordon has carved an individual path to her first album, following her percussive, sample-rich Resili collaboration with Frazer Gordon. Here, acoustic instrumentation and electronics merge to create a work of extraordinary range. There are subtle beats and shimmering keyboards ('Parting Game'), spiralling cellos and guitars ('Isolee With Sarah'), fast-forward chirrups and bells ('Stride Breaker') and gorgeous piano arpeggios ('Joanna Picollo'). An unapologetically singular vision, but one with multiple routes in, pointing to a future of almost endless possibilities. **AT**

BASTIEN KEB - PHOTO: MAX FINNIS

BASTIEN KEB

Organ Recital

GEARBOX

The latest album from Leamington Spa's Bastien Keb (aka Seb Jones) continues the borderless, exploratory approach honed on 2020's 'The Killing Of Eugene Peeps'. 'I Wanna Be Your Man' stirs the stylistic melting pot with a dusty beat, featuring a billiard ball sample before breaking out into a vocal and bassline both full of treacly warmth, before 'Protonooo Savvy GTi' surprises by moving from icy, mournful 1980s synthpop to a beatific string arrangement and Jones' heart-wrenching vocals, steeped in Matt Berninger-esque introspection. Restless, eclectic and brilliantly undefinable. **MS**

JUSTIN WRIGHT

A Really Good Spot

FIRST TERRACE / BEACON SOUND

Montreal cellist Justin Wright's second album is a wonderful ode to the process of making music. Wright peppers each track with background chat and field recordings, artfully examining the illusion of the music studio through cuts such as 'Surfacing / Irregular Verbs In The Present Tense', where galactic synths sweep and then, out of nowhere, a French language lesson is taking place. On 'We're Still Here', with its clinking teacups, we also hear vocalist Thanya Iyer's post-take giggles and Wright's gorgeously laboured cello. Intimate listening at its finest. **ILS**

THE HOME CURRENT

The Singles 2015-2019

WOODFORD HALSE

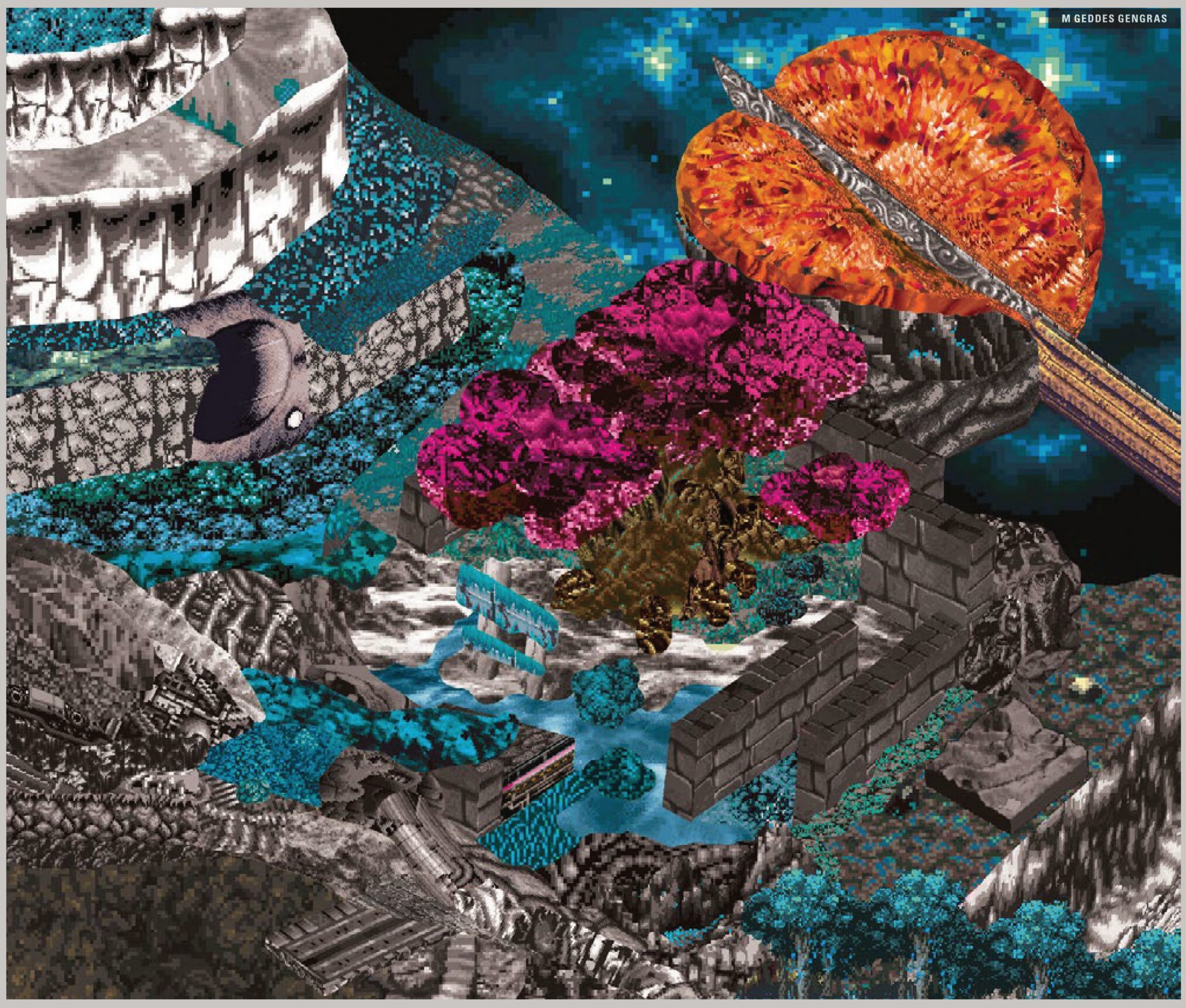
Martin Jensen himself has probably lost count of the Home Current albums he produced in a pre-lockdown purple patch. But ahead of his 2018 debut LP, he established himself as an accomplished singles artist, his winsome seven-inch missives scattered across multiple labels. Assembled here, they make a beguiling collection. 2015's 'Wix' is the house-obsessed Jensen with one foot in the sweaty Copenhagen clubs of his youth, and 2016's 'That Summer' is a haunted banger, like Mordant Music at the Ministry Of Sound. A charming throwback to what already feels like a more innocent age. **BF**

LOCAL ARTIST

Expanding Horizons

MOOD HUT

This new collection from Ian Wyatt sees the Canadian "underground party starter" take at least one foot off the dancefloor, as the nine tracks here employ far moodier textures than his previous releases. Opening track 'Head Right' sets the tone with its smooth, laid-back jazz groove, while the delayed vocals and holistic chimes of 'Without You' veer into psychedelic territory. And once you get to the cool, fuzzy guitar lines of the title track, you know that the revellers have shifted to the hot tub and that someone's on the way with another coco fizz. **JS**



M GEDDES GENGRAS
Expressed, I Noticed Silence
HAUSU MOUNTAIN

There's something unashamedly celestial about the latest album from veteran American ambient producer Gengras. The addition of his brother Cyrus on delayed, effects-heavy guitar only adds to the heavenly vibe, as tracks like 'The Harmony And Also I Became Square Movement' incorporate new age bells, gentle synth sequences and wafting strings. 'Give As Proportion' is arguably the simplest and best moment here, like the gap between blasts in a Spiritualized set, but it's the sense of restraint while handling such rich ingredients that is ultimately at the heart of this excellent album's success. **BW**

SIG NU GRIS
Threshold
SPIRIT LEVEL

Sig Nu Gris is the nom de plume of Erin Hyde, a producer from Melbourne, Australia whose deconstructed utopian electronica takes its cue from classic-era Warp – Aphex Twin, The Black Dog – and 90s rave. The title of her debut album is well-chosen, with tracks such as 'Space Alen 100' feeling like they're constantly on the verge of exploding with pure bliss. 'Ardkore Mega Expansion' is self-explanatory, while '7' is a spiky array of hard pulses and bass drums, a wake-up call amid the dizzying dreamscapes. Definitely a name to watch. **JB**

BERNARD GRANCHER
Noires Sont Les Galaxies
WOODFORD HALSE

Cult French synthesiser maestro Bernard Grancher is full of surprises. He has released work under several guises, including The GBBG Sexx Toys Akestra and Audace, and in 2016 he posed on the cover of solo album 'Cocktail Monotone' pointing a 12-bore shotgun down the camera lens – it was well-received by critics, no doubt terrified of upsetting him. His latest album is inspired by the 1981 French sci-fi series 'Noires Sont Les Galaxies', full of eccentric and sometimes disturbing synth workouts such as 'Je Suis Mort En Dansant Au Mexique' and 'Belle Et Vindicative'. Ç'est fou bon! **JA**

VĀDIN
Black Tortoise
UTTER

Vādin's second album takes a similar form of creative inspiration to their 2020 debut 'Taiy'ō', with sound artists and performers Lucie Štepankova (Avsluta) and Christian Duka writing darkwave-tinted music on countryside getaways. 'Black Tortoise' sees the duo in superb development and summoning far stronger energies. 'Astrologia 'is a spooky, lingering ambient shadow full of droning voices, while 'The Presence' is a daunting account of facing that ancient fear of the dark set to discomforting, bone-rattling drums. **FH**

ON MAN
On Man
HOUNDSTOOTH

The first album from Hertfordshire producer On Man showcases an adaptable style that moves effortlessly through broken electropop and resolute hip hop. Filled with memorable, clever and insistent left-field pop moments, 'On Man' is often at its best in the more adventurous passages. 'Sever' has a wonky electronic grandeur replete with face-melting guitar riffs, while the sparse, standout 'Worse Than It Seems' (featuring vocalist Tailor) sits somewhere between fragile Factory Records noir and anguished, all-enveloping soul. **MS**

ALIENATIONIST
Don't Worry, You Can Always Be Reborn As A Screenshot
BANDCAMP

Alienationist's debut album sits sonically close to German electronic producer Christoph de Babalon's 1997 album, 'If You're Into It, I'm Out Of It'. Although it's 25 years on, and dark ambient and hardcore breaks aren't the most ingenious blend, Berliner Alienationist's use of fractured German poetry and modern attention to atmospheric sound design definitely marks his music out. The staggered, lightly crumpled breaks of 'Manifest0', for example, really cut through. Think Zomby with woozy, junglist vibes and you're getting halfway close. **FH**

ITALO BRUTALO
Heartware
BUNGALO DISCO

The "three-armed bandit", so called because of his tournament-winning DJ wizardry, releases a long-awaited debut album. Brutalo delivers enticing electro with genuine spark. The endlessly rolling beats proudly foreground the ancient E-Mu and Akai synths he's used since he was literally in nappies. Chords are bright and vocal samples are cheeky ("Ch-chemical element!"). The delightful 'Analog Bars', using his beloved Korg DVP-1, turns an understated rhythm into a glorious electronic earworm. Home is where the hardware is. **FR**

JIGEN
Stone Drum Avantgardism
DOUBLE CIRCUMFLEX

Originally released in 1998 by Jigen's own Shi-Ra-Nui imprint, 'Stone Drum Avantgardism' shines a light on the way the Japanese underground scene reacted to both drum 'n' bass and its corruptive cousin drill 'n' bass. '二番勝負対左弦音無' weaves child-like melodies and free jazz exhortations across glitchy, stop-start breakbeats, and '四番勝負対次弦三求敗' sees a churning double bass and a scratchy, faltering beat locked in glorious battle, like Charlie Mingus and Aphex Twin jamming. Way out, but well worth the trip. **BW**

RACHIKA NAYAR - PHOTO: YULISSA BENITEZ

RACHIKA NAYAR

Heaven Come Crashing

NNA TAPES

With a hypnagogic sheen that recalls albums by Stuck Sunsets and Sound of Ceres, Brooklyn musician Rachika Nayar has sneaked in something weightier beneath a similarly dreamy haze on 'Heaven Come Crashing'. Tracks such as 'Promises' and 'Sleepless' create rich tapestries of emotive electronics, but the standout is 'Tetramorph', a rolling, 10-minute behemoth that flexes from banks of cascading synth echo into a tautly orchestrated crescendo pulse. Brooklyn's NNA Tapes rarely miss, and this is another direct hit. **ST**

KID MOXIE

Better Than Electric

BANDCAMP

"The Downtown LA skyline, night rides and retro-futuristic love scenes". Such are the influences Greek-born Elena Charbila claims for this glossiest of glossy pop albums. 'Shine' is lit with neon seductiveness – "I'm taking the lead in the back seat / I'll make you shine tonight," she sings, amid thumping beats. But Charbila has worked with Angelo Badalamenti, and her earworms have an appropriately cinematic quality. 'Better Than Electric' boasts flamenco touches and 'Thunderstuck' brings dystopian, widescreen synths to – brace yourself – the most unlikely AC/DC cover of the year. **BF**

DUFFIN

Helicopter

SHADOW WORLD

Sax and synth player Christopher Duffin appears to be a man in demand, having played with the likes of muscular disco outfit Holodrum, post-punk grungers Drahla and ambient offshoot XAM Duo. 'Helicopter' sees the Leeds musician go it alone, as he flashes his experimental jazz chops on these scintillating sax-infused electronic instrumentals. From the warping loops of 'Outgoing Visible And Flexible' to the skittish rhythms of 'Boosterism', you start to wonder if there's anything this Yorkshireman can't do. **ILS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Valley Of The Sun: Field Guide To Inner Harmony

NUMERO GROUP

Between 1977 and 1990, American self-help guru and hypnotist Dick Sutphen did his best to plant the new age flag in the centre of the civilisation with his Valley Of The Sun label. Now reissuers Numero Group have bolted together some of his best releases into this extended compilation. Sure, there's a powerful whiff of white sage smoke in the air, but there's also straight-up gold – check out David Storrs' Tangerine Dream-worthy 'Channel For The Light (Part II)' and the blissed-out synthwave of Robert Slap & Steve Powell's 'Sex Drive'. **JS**

YOTTO
Erased Dreams
REFLECTIONS

Anyone who thinks they know this renowned, Helsinki-based bass-freak DJ might have to think again on hearing this gorgeously pensive downtempo work. Revealing an entirely parallel side to his creative muse, Yotto presents us here with a fully unexpected palette of pellucid ambient textures and vaporous soundwaves inspired by The KLF's 1990 'Chill Out' album. Plotting his emotional lockdown journey through poignant tracks like the ethereal 'Silhouette', 'Erased Dreams' is an unapologetically escapist treat. **CG**

LORENZO MORRESI & TENDERLONIOUS
Cosmica Italiana
22A

After enticing us with a couple of superb singles, Italian synthesist Lorenzo Morresi and south London's wind instrument supremo Tenderlonious don velvet spacesuits for a smooth trip through seductive, library-tinged space funk. Morresi's array of analogue synths align brilliantly with Tender's soaring solos, as acid warbles merge with purring flute and a 909 beat on 'Tema Cinque', while '5 AM' is more rocket fuel, beginning like a Balearic tune before funking out in Donald Byrd style, as Morresi tests just how high his Juno-60 can fly. **ILS**

NAOMI ALLIGATOR
Double Knot
CARPARK

Naomi Alligator album please, and make it snappy. A lo-fi Virginia doodler uprooted to California, Alligator's first album for Carpark is a winsome encapsulation of 20-something angst. "I want to break up with you for the 10th time now / I want to get back with you for the tenth time now," she sighs indecisively on 'Over'. Amid the rawness, she has a charming turn of phrase – "Sam is made of quicksand and I love him all the same / Time to put a footprint on him before it fades away," she grins on 'Blue For You'. Banjos chime, wobbly synths… well, wobble. A delight. **BF**

RUSTY SANTOS
High Reality
LO RECORDINGS

The new album from sometime Animal Collective producer Rusty Santos was named after his state of mind following a psychotic breakdown. The nine electronically framed folk rock tracks here are full of vocals laced with a haunted euphoria, gifting 'Master Zodiac' and 'Kick Out The Spirit' the same tortured catharsis that dominated Bleachers' debut album. The contemplative 'Symbolic' is the standout moment, featuring softly strummed guitars and introspective lyrics, interspersed with gently cascading synth sprinkles and a deft, one-note keyboard melody. Dreamy and deep. **MS**

TOMU DJ
Half Moon Bay
FRANCHISE

Tomu DJ weaves together self-contained worlds, all without maps. Where others are content to mine familiar sounds and paint themselves into ever more confined sound corners, this California producer is a free spirit, exploring what it means to be an electronic artist in 2022. Beats subtly shift and melodies layer, as on the gentle 'Spring Of Life'. She traverses house, breaks and ambient across this second album with the overriding drive to explore the rise and fall of emotions, tracing a journey that's by turns utterly joyful and melancholic. **AT**

OLEKSANDR DEMIANENKO
In Memory Of...
ENMOSSED

'In Memory Of…' strikes the same notes as The Caretaker, that sound attainable through a dedication to the memory of something dead or dying. That the music was written before the Russian invasion of Demianenko's native Ukraine only adds to its integral weight. Dedicated to late Ukrainian folk singer Olga Sergeeva, Demianenko blankets tape-looped snippets of her mesmeric singing in synths and pedal effects. Passages of song slip through the grey malaise of 'Segment 2', as moments of harmonic majesty stud a soft, darkening sky like legions of tiny stars. **FH**

OKZHARP
Outside The Ride
HYPERDUB

Encouraged to explore the underused 156 bpm tempo by fitting a slower track to the short film it was written for, South African-born Londoner Okzharp ploughs a unique experimental furrow while borrowing from gqom, techstep and footwork. 'Fall In Up In The CLK' sets an early high bar, a thrilling and brutal bleeps-and-beats combo, while other highlights include the marching momentum of 'Cut It Out' and 'Obsidian Root Power Up', a menacing footwork stomper. Original and focused future beats. **BW**

STEVE FORS
It's Nothing, But Still
HALLOW GROUND

Steve Fors is a Swiss-based musician and composer, and 'It's Nothing, But Still' is a concept album inspired by his life with a chronic lung condition. Accordingly, tracks such as '(Good Enough) For Now' and 'Lead Into Aether' are breathy and intense, as though articulating something from deep within his chest, while ambient, electronic and acoustic hues fuse to beguiling effect. Most evocative is final track 'The Way To Heaven', which, after the deep inhalations of the preceding pieces, takes the sound of a train engine and rolls it out into one long and glorious exhalation. **ST**

ANDREW TUTTLE

ANDREW TUTTLE

Fleeting Adventure

BASIN ROCK

Probably for obvious reasons, you'll seldom find reference to the banjo on these pages. However, gifted ambient/experimental composer Andrew Tuttle is a master of the instrument, along with the resonator guitar. The Australian is also a deft exponent of subtle, diaphanous electronics, which carry the golden, balm-like strings of his banjo into thrillingly new and expansive sonic territories.

This fifth album follows 2020's lauded 'Alexandra', and plunges us deeper into Tuttle's kaleidoscopic, subtropically lush vision. It's a work that meditates on how differently we perceived travel and freedom under lockdown, "loosely based around navigating the aftermaths and interregnums of a restless era". The serene 'Overnight's A Weekend' encapsulates all of that. A journey re-evaluated perhaps, transformed into a breathtaking widescreen fantasy redolent – like the rest of this wonderful album – of infinite sunset horizons and languorous high-summer flow. Stunningly good. **CG**

REGAL WORM

Worm!

QUATERMASS

Locked in a humming South Yorkshire laboratory, I Monster's mild-mannered Jarrod Gosling once again necks a test tube of bubbling elixir, sprouts unruly eyebrows and an industrial jawline, and transforms into Regal Worm's psychedelic synth-prog bogeyman Varrod Goblink, before rampaging through the unsuspecting streets of Sheffield with this latest album of splendid cosmic daftness.

The Ween-esque stoner muzak of 'Bong Song' sets the tone. "Whirlpools skim each other / Dust clouds form a planet / Centrifugal forces dropping fast," sings Goblink, exploring the universe with three bags of Monster Munch and a KitKat Chunky close at hand.

'Don't Freak Out The Creatures' is pure 1960s Zappa, and 'The Steppe Nomad Space Program' sets Kazakhstan folk trappings loose on relentless electro beats. He claims Fun Boy Three influences for 'Chlorophyllia', but ye gods… only if Terry Hall had munched his way through half a tin of space cakes and spent 16 hours straight listening to Gong. Beautifully performed, and brilliant fun. **BF**

WET SATIN

Wet Satin

FUZZ CLUB

LA-based Wet Satin is the new instrumental project from Jason Miller and Marc Melzer, formerly of Lumerians. Just as their previous band progressed from brain-melting space rock through interstellar post-punk and funky retro-electronica, Wet Satin create a hybrid sound that could variously be termed junk shop kosmische, alien exotica or sci-fi dub.

It's not entirely serious, but there's a sense of tension among the fun which stops it from tipping over into novelty. Imagine a playful mix of Pram, Sun Araw and DJ Shadow.

'WitchKraft Singles' is a great opener, replete with cool vibes, organ, claps and strings, and 'Mallangong' is echoey, gurgling death disco, its queasy synth melody edging towards Boards Of Canada territory. 'FonzieDance4U' is a skanking cowboy theme, albeit one where the cowboys are on Mars riding giant lizards, while 'Colored Tongues' features some nice slip-sliding guitar which builds towards a relatively epic finale. **JB**

HOT CHIP - PHOTO: MATILDA HILL JENKINS

HOT CHIP

Freakout/Release

DOMINO

Despite taking its songwriting cue from their own version of Beastie Boys' riotous 'Sabotage' – not featured here – Hot Chip's eighth album is an orderly affair. Lead single 'Down' sets the tone by sampling college disco outfit Universal Togetherness Band. Glitterballs but geeky. Bang full of absolute tunes, too.

The title track is clunky funk by a grumpy robot. 'Time' has melancholic house vibes. The disco pop of 'Eleanor' has all the levity of Daft Punk's 'Get Lucky'. Sound of the summer.

But that gives me pause. There's still DIY daftness of old – shredded rave synths here, distorted vocals there. And Canadian rapper Cadence Weapon and Skint Records' Lou Hayter are a cobweb-blasting surprise. However, Alexis Taylor's pinched vocals aside, not much of this sounds like the awkward Hot Chip we know. "Am I still broken?" he sings on the soft 'Broken'. No, he's not. This likeable yet uncharacteristic album sounds very un-sabotaged indeed. **FR**

RÖYKSOPP

Profound Mysteries II

PIAS

There's never been a better year than 2022 to be a Röyksopp fan. The Norwegian duo, who appeared to be on the brink of winding things down not so long ago, are unleashing an entire universe connected to their 'Profound Mysteries' concept. We've had films from Scandinavian production company Bacon, a whole host of remixes from artists like Henry Saiz and Township Rebellion, and hyperreal visuals from Australian artist Jonathan Zawada. Most importantly, there's a ton of new music, with this second album coming hot on the heels of the previous one.

If 'Profound Mysteries' represented a furtive return to the spotlight with curtain-twitching and suburban weirdness, then 'Profound Mysteries II' is wide awake in Bergen, Berlin or Bangkok, or wherever else has a sweaty box to get on down in.

'Unity', recorded with County Durham R&B singer Karen Harding, is built for dancefloors, complete with drops to take your breath away, while 'Oh, Lover' with Susanne Sundfør keeps up the remarkable track record these artists have of creating magic together. If this one doesn't tell a story as well as the first, it certainly makes up for it with an abundance of bangers. **JA**

HOWLROUND

Trespass & Welfare

BURIED TREASURE

For his latest Howlround album, the irrepressible Robin The Fog used two vintage tape recorders – a venerable Revox B77 and a UHER 6000 – connected to one another to create a continuous back-and-forth feedback event. Not dissimilar to Toshimaru Nakamura's no-input mixing board, 'Trespass & Welfare' features nothing but those two machines and whatever was on the tape to begin with, resulting in a messily hypnotic sequence of high-velocity loops.

At times, on tracks like 'Rec And Ruin' and 'Cosmic Funghi Mind Muck', those loops suggest a sense of rhythm, both suffused with grainy, bass-heavy noises that infer some sort of distortion device was involved (but wasn't). 'Low Down The Harridan' is a moment of retro-futurist glee, transporting us to an early Bell Labs or IRCAM tape session, all amorphous textures and squishy pulses, while 'A Bird In The Head' sounds like a busted recording of an Aztec campfire jam.

With his inimitable sonic adventuring, our hero has once again crafted otherworldly sounds beyond our wildest imaginations. **MS**

ELECTRONIC SOUND
LIVE SESSIONS /
COMING TO A SCREEN
NEAR YOU SHORTLY

POLYPORES
Hyperincandescent
DiN

"My mind is chaotic, the entire universe is chaotic," claims Lancashire modular maestro Stephen James Buckley. "This is my experience of it transmutated into a sort of shimmering sonic monolith." For his debut release on DiN, Buckley creates two mercurial 20-minute suites. The title track begins with swirling bleeps, the detuning of Buckley's own mental longwave radio, before settling into amniotic waves and the chatter of some exotic, tropical forest of the mind. Sometimes the shifts in tone are imperceptible, sometimes jarring, but it's always fascinating.

Meanwhile, 'Floating In The Meme Pool' builds gently before a crunching gear shift into bubbling arpeggios. But there are moments of calm, with soothing, summer morning melodies seeping gently through the maelstrom. And the title itself? 'Hyperincandescent' is a word coined by DJ Kate Bosworth to describe the affecting vividness of Buckley's ambient experiments. If this album is his mental mind palace, it's a place where they're constantly knocking down walls and seeking planning permission for extensions. **BF**

MIRACLIS
Origin Of Truth
SECRET TEACHINGS

As signing stories go, the discovery of Miraclis is one for the ages. Not so long ago, DJ and Crosstown Rebels label boss Damien Lazarus found himself locked out of his Chile hotel in the early hours, and chanced upon Miraclis sitting quietly adjacent to a woodland campfire. Lazarus found a bed for the night thanks to the gracious stranger who opened his home up to him. He'd also inadvertently stumbled upon the first act for his new label Secret Teachings.

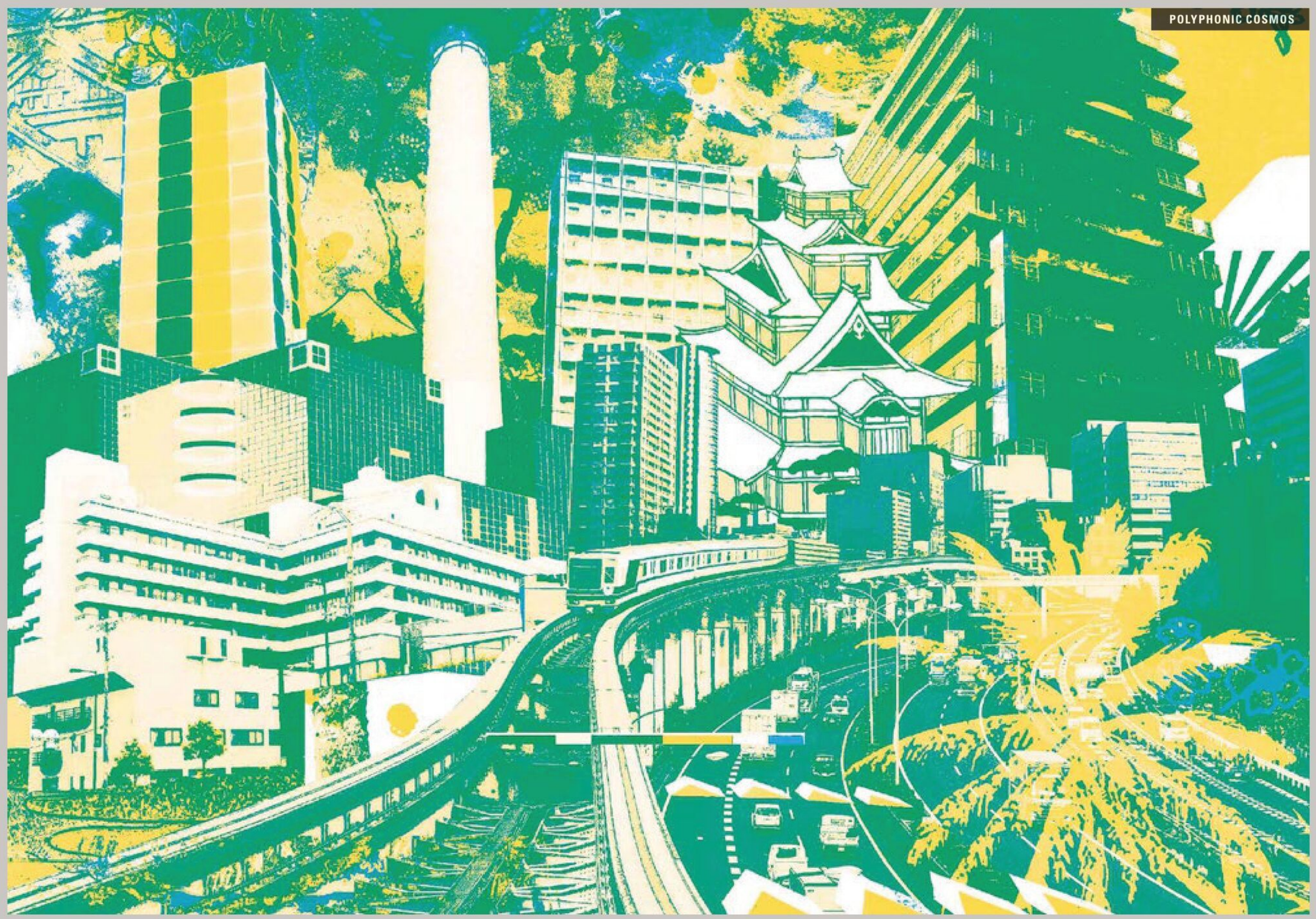
'Origin Of Truth' is not only a product of serendipity, but also the pandemic, recorded whilst the Chilean musician looked after his father as the world shut down. It's certainly brooding and introspective as a result, though there are smart flourishes that belie a debut record.

Opening track 'Sonnet 71' is imbued with the subtle, assured swing of Massive Attack's 'Karmacoma' while 'Floating Child' possesses the menace and perhaps some of the existential blues of Matt Johnson. On top of all that is a soupcon of the mystical energy that brought the artist together with a man named Lazarus. **JA**

GROTTO TERRAZZA
Kalte Köstlichkeiten
MAPLE DEATH

'Preludio' bounds vibrantly from the speaker, like the baroque soundtrack to a 1980s advert for a coffee machine composed by Moon Wiring Club. Described in the album notes as "an ecstatic uptempo, punchy mitteleuropa celebration of punks in the city", Munich musician Thomas Schamann captures a sense of the continental, somewhere between weird avant-garde and shiny cosmopolitan that this city and many of its central European counterparts exude.

'Inspektor Ginko' rolls smooth percussive rhythms beneath louche nocturnal bass, while 'Senza Piombo 95' shimmies beneath synths which recall Todd Terje at his most retro-cool. This evocation of Middle Europe can sometimes result in a kind of post-Kraftwerk sterility, but here it registers with character and warmth. 'Dusty Kapers Skit' sounds like Cluster making fairground music, while 'Tokamak' has a kind of Bontempi-at-the-beach sashay which, combined with interjections of tannoy-muffled German dialogue, sounds like a nightmare about buying suntan lotion in a sinister Kaufhaus. **ST**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Polyphonic Cosmos: Sonic Innovations In Japan (1980-1986)

CEASE AND DESIST

It's a long way from Glasgow to Japan, but connecting sonic dots across space and time is what Optimo's JD Twitch does best. Lovingly and painstakingly put together, this celebration of Japanese electronic music arrives after eight years in the making, with the process beset by what Twitch describes as "complex, restrictive and expensive" licensing agreements. During that time, the wider music market has cottoned on to the trailblazing sounds from this particular corner of the world, but this 14-track compilation serves newcomers and devotees equally well.

Cuts from Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yasuaki Shimizu (aka Mariah) highlight the better-known side of Japan's dynamic electronic avant-gardism, and Haruomi Hosono brings his production wizardry to the ethereal, folksy 'ばら二曲 Baranikyoku (Fellini&Rota)' by World Standard. Normal Brain's 1981 track 'M U S I C' strikes a Kraftwerk-esque vibe, and the hazy funk of 'dB' by mysterious Kyoto group EP-4 is an irresistible excursion in eastern post-punk. A joyful, essential selection representing the staggering breadth of Japanese machine-made music from a golden era. **CF**

BLANK WALL SEASON

Thoughts On Manifolds

GENOT CENTRE

Blank Wall Season, aka Istanbul experimental/electronic producer Kaan Işık, creates music that's both subtle and grandiose. Marking a half-century of releases on Prague's Genot Centre label, 'Thoughts On Manifolds' is an album of impossible shapes, anomalous physics and quite unusual calibre.

It's a disorienting environment, for sure – all shattered glass and textured drifts, like a tour of some synthetic future. Heavy on the knob-twiddling, Işık tries to guide the listener, but scenes flutter by with little explanation, leaving the greater part up to a racing imagination.

Best just to strap in and enjoy the spectacle. Check out the granular 'Mirror Chamber' – a perfect marriage of rough, glistening hypersonics and treacle-slowed ambient drawl. **FH**

MARK VERNON

A World Behind This World

PERSISTENCE OF SOUND

The work of Mark Vernon is a kind of aural alchemy, conjuring nuggets of gold from everyday ephemera. Last year's 'Sonograph Sound Effects Series Volume 2: Public And Domestic Plumbing And Sanitation' created strange new landscapes from ubiquitous gurgles and glugs, and 'A World Behind This World' is a similar piece of sonic magic.

'Fugitives From Bliss' transforms chainsaw chug into time-slowed growl like the guttural call of some lurking monster, while 'New Golden Severities (Vermin Under The Stars)' swoops us omnipotently through a landscape of bleating sheep and running water, before sinking down to a subterranean sewer drone. As the near-20-minute piece progresses, a climatic whoosh and turbine-like hum merge into birdsong and rumbles, which harmonise in unexpectedly emotive patterns.

Rather than simply documenting a landscape or an object, Vernon's work sweeps recorded sounds – from the rural environment to industrial machinery – into something fantastic and new, creating vivid soundscapes from disparate sonic detritus. **ST**

SZUN WAVES

Earth Patterns

THE LEAF LABEL

British trio's magical, microcosmic return

In the blurb for Szun Waves' third album, synth player Luke Abbott calls it "an emotional outpouring" – he's not wrong. More so even than the group's previous recordings, there's the visceral sense of the music unstoppably bursting into being, a necessary expression of something which can be contained no longer. This may be because of the way it was made.

Recorded by Abbott, saxophonist Jack Wyllie and drummer Laurence Pike during intense improvisation sessions held over three days in 2019, global events then intervened, with the players isolated and the recordings put on ice. But the extra time to finesse what they'd created, and add input from James Holden, has produced an album of volcanic energy. And yet it never feels like formless, eruptive noise – instead, as the fabulously descriptive title suggests, it's sometimes like we're listening to the whirling of the upper atmosphere or the roar of a fire.

'Exploding Upwards' captures the mood perfectly. Fat analogue bass chords perform a deep tissue sonic massage before a slow yawning sax stretches and flexes, as tendrils of synth shoot into the sky. It reaches a point of brightness, then gradually disperses, the waking up of some cosmic soundsystem. Holden's input is evident on 'New Universe', its bustling rhythm infiltrated by rippling, ripping electronics, as though tearing a hole in reality. It builds towards a ritualistic crescendo, the sound of something alive, and about as far away from a Logic Pro recording as it's possible to get.

This sense of the organic is reinforced on 'Garden' – the patter of toms, a wavering, distorted note and the light caresses of sax all evoke late-era Talk Talk, before that wild, skirling synth reappears. But it's on the extended 'Be A Pattern For The World' that Szun Waves take their music to its natural conclusion, a vast electroacoustic vista that slowly builds into a monumental swell of ecstatic sounds – not to inspire awe, but to envelop and comfort.

'Earth Patterns' is an abstract hymn to nature, pulling order from apparent chaos and finding sense from the sensuous.

JOE BANKS

Brief Encounters

Szun Waves' **Luke Abbott** takes on our quick-fire question machine

Hello, Luke. Where are you right now and what can you see?

"I'm at home, it's midnight and I'm lying on my bed. I can see a clothes rail on one side and a bedroom studio set-up on the other. During the pandemic, I fell in love with having a bedroom studio again – it's only a slight annoyance to my girlfriend. I like making music at home because I can hang out with my cat."

What's on your agenda today?

"There's nothing on my slate other than a load of MaxMSP programming. I've been making software in Max for writing and performing music for years. I'm going on an artist retreat soon where I hope to do a set of recordings with it, so I've got to get a stable build ready for then."

Your 'Earth Patterns' album was recorded in 2019, at the end of a European tour. Is it true that you, Jack Wyllie and Laurence Pike haven't been in the same country since?

"Yep, we're a long-distance, remote project for the time being. When we made our second album we were living on three different continents."

Due to Covid, the record had a longer gestation period than usual. How did that affect things?

"It was really beneficial, I think. I kept coming back to the recordings and using some of the takes we'd written off as being too odd for release. I ended up hitting on a track selection that felt like a deeply introspective cosmic journey, and it just felt like the right record to put out."

It's a very organic-sounding album, with titles such as 'Garden' and 'Willow Leaf Pear'. Is that what you were after?

"The titles loosely reflect the idea of going from the macrocosm to the microcosm, of going on an inward journey. Our last album felt a bit like floating in space, but this one is like crashing back down to Earth. There's another track called 'Be A Pattern For The World', taken from Lao Tzu's 'Tao Te Ching'. I think that title sums it up."

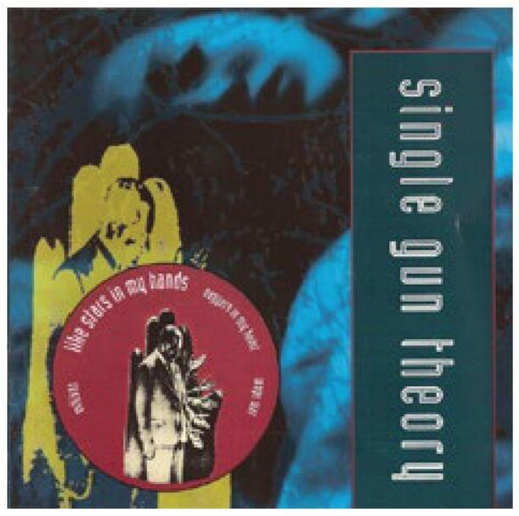
You're based in Norwich. What do you think of the city's current electronic music scene?

"There's always been an undercurrent of experimental things going on. I'm really happy getting on with my own stuff and ignoring the outside world, but I do some teaching on a music degree locally so I know there are people in Norwich making new things happen. Music aside, the street food scene here has gotten really good of late."

The last time we spoke, it was all Brexit. This time it's Covid. What's next?

"I hope we get hit with proportional representation and environmentally focused systematic change – that would be good."

Buried Treasure



SINGLE GUN THEORY

Millions, Like Stars In My Hands, Daggers In My Heart, Wage War

NETTWERK, 1991

In retrospect, the films we watched growing up as kids in Australia in the early 1990s were extremely weird. There must have been something in the water in 1993 especially – the year that gave us the bizarre duo of 'Reckless Kelly' and 'The Heartbreak Kid'. 'Reckless Kelly' starred kooky comic actor Yahoo Serious in a satirical modern-day take on the legend of Ned Kelly that also features a pre-Matrix fame Hugo Weaving. 'The Heartbreak Kid' was about a questionable romance between a 22-year-old high school teacher who falls in love with her 17-year-old student. To say neither of these movies has aged well is an understatement, but the soundtracks have held up slightly better, and what links them both is the inclusion of music by Single Gun Theory.

Single Gun Theory were Jacqui Hunt, Pete Rivett-Carnac and Kath Power. Formed in Sydney in 1986, their downtempo electronica was way ahead of the curve at a time when Australia's airwaves were dominated by rock and pop. Tom Ellard of Severed Heads was an early champion of the band (Rivett-Carnac was briefly a member of Severed Heads' touring line-up) and brought them to the attention of the Canadian label Nettwerk, who specialised in dance and industrial music and were responsible for getting Severed Heads' music into North America.

The trio released their debut album 'Exorcise This Wasteland' in 1987 on Nettwerk, and 'Millions, Like Stars In My Hands, Daggers In My Heart, Wage War' followed in 1991. Inspired by Hunt and Rivett-Carnac's travels through south-east Asia, the album incorporates field recordings from their trip and eastern music with warm analog electronics, spoken-word samples and Hunt's smooth-as-glass vocals. The radio-friendly single 'From A Million Miles' fuses club beats with a smattering of global sounds and became their most recognisable song (winding up on the previously mentioned 'Reckless Kelly' soundtrack). 'Take Me Back' opens with a recording of Natalie Wood from the 1961 film 'Splendour In The Grass', before morphing into moody trip hop, and 'Angels Over Teheran' mixes hip hop and a vibrant collage of samples that had to have had a formative influence on later Australian electronic acts like The Avalanches.

Across the album, the fusion of slow-moving, slightly psychedelic electronica and world-spanning instrumentation sounds firmly rooted in the 1990s, but at the time, Single Gun Theory were at the forefront of the trip hop genre – you could argue that they were Australia's first trip hop group. 'Millions, Like Stars' sounds a bit like Thievery Corporation, a bit like Portishead and a bit like Bel Canto, but with a unique Antipodean sunniness at its heart. The album achieved Top 40 success in Australia, and David Byrne and Australian film director Peter Weir were said to be fans. Single Gun Theory released one more album, 'Flow, River Of My Soul' in 1994, and a soundtrack for the film 'The Monkey's Mask' in 2001, but 'Millions, Like Stars' is the best example of their singular and somewhat forgotten talent.

CLAIRE FRANCIS

KAITLYN AURELIA SMITH

Let's Turn It Into Sound

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Fun and games from American electronicist

For her latest album, Buchla enthusiast Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith employed a vocal processing technique that, apparently, involved walking in the rain with a subwoofer strapped to her back. The quizzical looks she no doubt received seem appropriate for an album that feels deeply inquisitive. Choral voices ride unstable squalls of melody as if searching for a destination, while brassy electronics add meandering unease.

Her vocals are reedier than the Enya elegance of 2020's 'The Mosaic Of Transformation', those cathedral qualities replaced by an almost pagan earthiness. Same religion, just outdoors. 'Have You Felt Lately?' sounds like a folk group a little drunk on cider, the song toppling from gentle whimsy into a taut mosaic of Flying Lotus-esque beats. At one point, there's a disappointed bassoon. 'Let It Fall' is singing practice where the choir's manuscripts are shredded, then the torn remains are guarded by the moodiest orchestra in town.

Smith calls this album a "puzzle". It does present itself as a rotating Rubik's Cube of ideas, its surfaces ever-changing yet holding together. Take the single 'Is It Me Or Is It You?', for instance. The patchwork structure – *so* much patchwork structure here – comprises fuzzy arpeggios bursting with light, cotton-soft woodwind ambience and an irresistible yet indecipherable vocal mantra, and taut breakbeats as heavy contrast. In the accompanying video, Smith boogies around in a motion capture suit, rendered in nuclear-blast colours designed to assault the eyes. She's challenging us. A fat beat is replaced by moody organ, a wonky waltz wrong-foots us, and before we know it, we're in the middle of a staggering jazz-funk workout. It really does feel like a conundrum that will never solve itself, but that's the fun.

The more you play this album, the more its unconventional structure embeds. It reveals the charm of the playground electronics on 'Check Your Translation', and just how epic and tuneful 'Unbraid: The Merge' sounds with its disco-sequinned jazz hands. How, exactly, does Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith continue to beguile us 10 years into her career? I don't think that question necessarily needs an answer. In fact, none of this does.

FAT ROLAND

KAIDI TATHAM

Don't Rush The Process

FIRST WORD

Belfast-based multi-instrumentalist Kaidi Tatham has remained quietly influential for over two decades, helping to shape the broken beat genre, and working alongside 4hero's Dego, Soul II Soul, boogie pioneer Leroy Burgess, Brazil's Marcos Valle and countless other musicians. At long last, it seems the wider world is waking up to his prodigious skills and songwriting, helped by a series of solo albums for First Word.

'Don't Rush The Process' finds Tatham in funk mode, with lush arrangements, bass, synths and live drums at the forefront. 'We Chillin' Out' with the Easy Access Orchestra has an addictive piano line and lithe electronic bass squidges, while 'All I Need' is a wonky, gospel-infused, J Dilla-style hip hop groove. Further on,'Runnin Tru' mixes sub-bass, broken beats and subtle Rhodes keys. Simmering with the heat of summer, this feels like a breakthrough record. **BM**

FAST DE

Sight Inside

BLOOMER

FAST DE is the brainchild of Dutch composer Daniël Eskens, who has been a jobbing bassist for fellow Dutch bands Jo Goes Hunting and Opera Alaska. 'Sight Inside' is a debut instrumental album that dances exhaustively between jazz, electronica, psychedelia and indie, with influences as diverse as Béla Bartók and Brian Wilson.

It's a record that's impressive in scale yet somehow quaint – the missing link between The Shadows and My Bloody Valentine, perhaps. But it also bridges the often insurmountable gulf between experimental and fun.

'Miss Trutti Finally Found Her Gem' makes a virtue of pitch-bending everything, with sporadic drum rolls that keep the whole thing from melting into a giant mush. 'Good To Get Lost' is bookended by the din of childish recorders and is good to get lost in. And the rocky 'Was Dat' is built from complex jazz chords, with a robotic breakdown that sounds like an analogue cyber attack. It's as inscrutable as it is short and sweet. **JA**

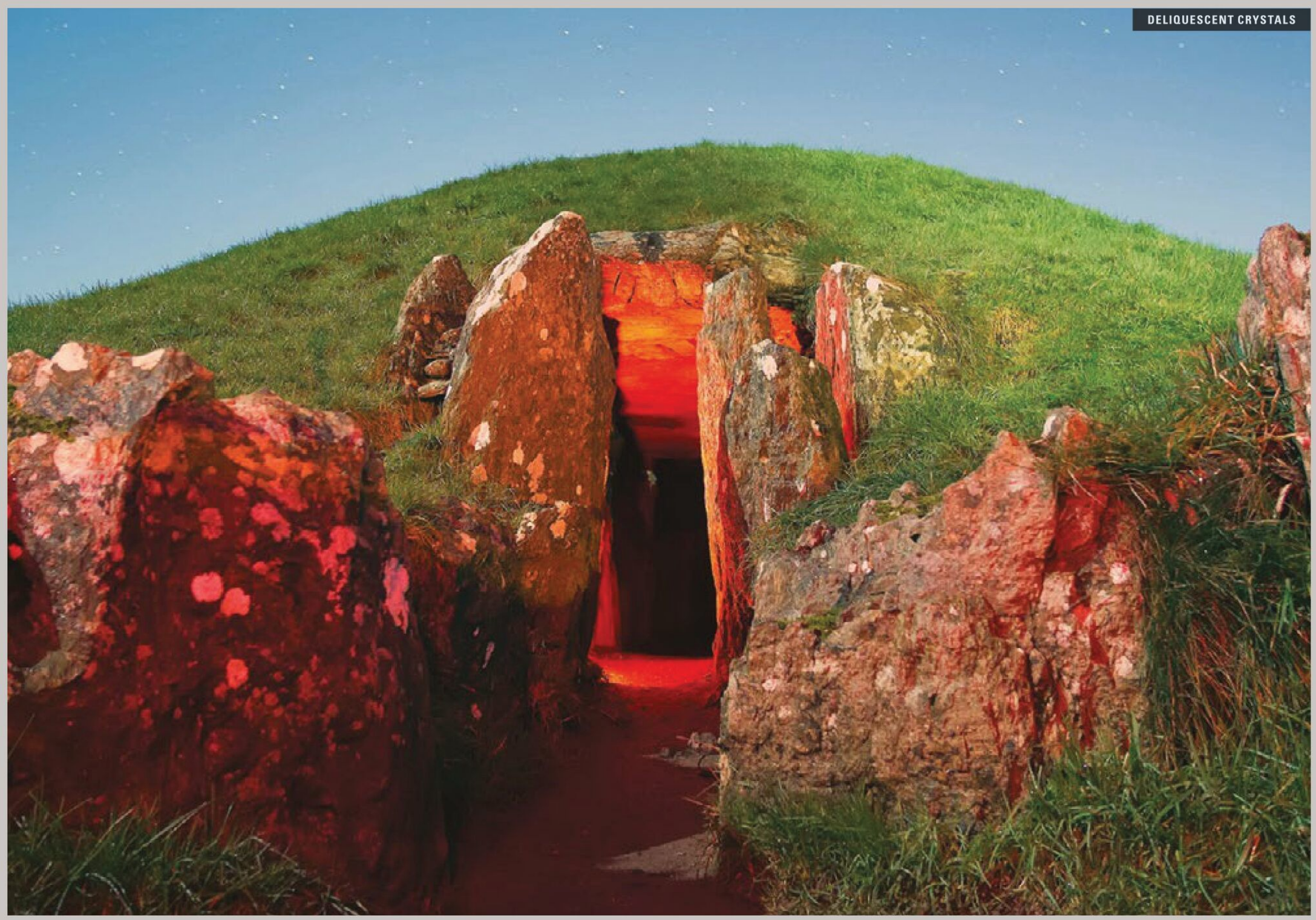
HUDSON MOHAWKE

Cry Sugar

WARP

It's incredible that this is only HudMo's third studio album in 13 years. Not that he's rested on his laurels, lending talent to Kanye West, Grand Theft Auto and Danny L Harle's delightfully daft 'Harlecore' album. 'Cry Sugar' is as euphoric and distracted as you'd expect. Smooth soul samples chopped and diced, nuclear bass drums, buttery trumpets, carpet bomb sequencing, and, on strangulated banger 'Behold', giddy vocals flattened into a pancake.

The longest track, 'Is It Supposed', feels like an anomaly, with its cheesy-chips melody and perky toms. But it's balanced by a more contemplative Mohawke – just listen to the urgent violins on 'Lonely Days' or how the whiplash snare dallies with the whimsy of 'Rain Shadow'. The press blurb for this album is as dizzying as its audio, taking in exercise bikes, meaty cook-outs, painting classes and 12-step programmes. Utter mayhem, in a good way. Expect to hear this everywhere. **FR**



DELIQUESCENT CRYSTALS
Time Turns Into Space
CASTLES IN SPACE

Welsh producer Benjamin Ian Powell's Deliquescent Crystals project isn't short of intriguing reference points. The name itself is taken from the JG Ballard novel, 'The Crystal World', in which time starts to solidify. Other influences include Steve Reich, Steve Hillage, HP Lovecraft and Julian Cope's megalithic study, 'The Modern Antiquarian'.

Powell's job as an oceanographic technician, mostly spent in isolated environments, must also have a bearing on his music – a dense, meditative take on ambient techno somewhere between early Tangerine Dream and Global Communication.

The strange, elliptical drones and heartbeat rhythm of 'Secret Knowledge' are punctuated by small explosions of treated guitar and deep acid glitches like the snoring of old gods. 'The Protectress In The Shadow' is darker, its muttering bassline, ticking percussion and long string segments creating a sense of everything happening in geological time. The patient trickling of an arpeggio on 'The Pattern Stone', like water gradually seeping through rock, adds to this impression. Recommended listening. **JB**

KUEDO
Infinite Window
BRAINFEEDER

Though he was once half of underground dubstep minimalists Vex'd, Berlin-based Jamie Teasdale, aka Kuedo, now makes music that's fit for a multiplex cinema. His previous albums, 'Severant' and 'Slow Knife', introduced a penchant for Vangelis-worthy melodies, all enveloping synthscapes and the happy-sad emotions of IDM, and 'Infinite Window' magnifies these qualities to create a gobsmacking imaginary soundtrack.

'Aeolian Bodies' is a spine-tingling beatless cascade of glimmering off-world notes. Aligned with heavy trap beats, the title track has speedy, trance-like arpeggios spiralling under brass synths – Vangelis himself would surely have approved. And 'Skybleed Magic', with its grandiose, 80s horror-flick vibe, heads firmly into S U R V I V E, Com Truise or Johnny Jewel territory. Kuedo really should be soundtracking the big sci-fi films by now – and I have a feeling he will be very soon. **BM**

NIILAS
Stone Skipping
NIILAS RECORDINGS

Grammy-winning Norwegian electronicist Peder Niilas Tårnesvik is the man behind this captivating meditation on the enigmatic Sapmi region of the far north, which stretches across Tårnesvik's homeland and into Sweden, Finland and Russia.

'Stone Skipping' is suffused with mind's eye cinematics. Evoking childhood recollections of skimming stones on high-summer fjords, it's an emotional response to an innocent past just out of reach. Subtle electronics, organic strings, evocative samples and field recordings captured on the rocky beaches of Kåfjord sonically articulate the near-ineffable, bathing us in pristine ambient light.

More than simply tranquil and comforting (though tracks like the propulsive 'Driving To Gárasavvon' are just that), there's a rich and rewarding expanse of searching sonic experimentation at play here, and Tårnesvik certainly has a deft touch. Unsettling yet somehow reassuring, 'Áddja' marries deconstructed electronic abstractions of whale noise with beautiful acoustics and melodic birdsong. Excellent. **CG**

AU SUISSE

Au Suisse

CITY SLANG

NYC dance masters join forces at last

There's a lot of hype around this record. As the complementary talents of Kelley Polar and Morgan Geist combine for the first time here, we've been given to expect something exceptional from Au Suisse.

The pair have been mates since their days at Ohio's Oberlin College in the 1990s, meeting by chance while shopping for Aphex Twin, LFO and Underground Resistance vinyl. Classically trained prodigy Polar mastered the viola at the Conservatory while Geist was hunkered down in his dorm room studio, tinkering around and taking techno into new realms.

They first teamed up on late-night college radio, and since then have made quite a mark on 21st-century dancefloors – initially, via Geist's superlative Metro Area releases, for which Polar provided trademark lush string arrangements. Then, once they'd both moved to New York, Geist co-produced Polar's acclaimed electropop albums on the Environ label.

Later, a remix of Geist's 'Look Right Through' – recorded under his Storm Queen alias – knocked Eminem and Rihanna off the UK Number One spot, and then one of Polar's chamber recordings got Madonna's blessing. They even toured together, but never recorded as a single act.

And so here they are, together at last. Two of the savviest aficionados of contemporary American dance music, taking many of their previous musical cues – house, electro, and synthpop in particular – and combining them with left-field pop and cosmic disco. Not that you need another reason to buy this fine record, but they've also brought in Caribou's Dan Snaith and Junior Boys' Jeremy Greenspan – gilding the lily a little, perhaps, but no one's complaining.

The opening track, 'Control', encapsulates the sound, building from polished future-pop iridescence through to a cinematic, sci-fi-esque crescendo that properly summons goosebumps. The glossy 'Thing', meanwhile, bursts with slick bass grooves, retro cowbells, shimmering synths and soaring vocals.

'Savage', though, is something else. Channelling the alt-pop perfection of Scritti Politti, it's imbued with thrilling, technicolour sonic detail and longing, melancholic vocals, flitting between pastel-hued yacht rock, euphoric eurodisco and soaring tech-house. The hype machine, it seems, has got it bang-on.

CARL GRIFFIN

Label Profile

TOUCH SENSITIVE RECORDS

Label: Touch Sensitive
Location: Belfast, Northern Ireland
Est: 2014

Potted History: "I was working with my friend – DJ and producer David Holmes – at Belfast's legendary club The Menagerie," explains label founder Mark Reid. "I'd had an inkling to start a label but David was a big motivator and facilitated the first two releases – his soundtrack for '71', and a post-punk compilation from the human music encyclopaedia, Gareth "Cherrystones" Goddard. From there, the label has moved through a series of archival and contemporary works split pretty much 50/50 from Ireland and further afield."

Mission Statement: "I want to shine a light on contemporary and archival producers who are in the shadows, and present their work in the finest way we can – whether it's being reassessed or heard for the first time. As the label grows older, I can feel a connection and a through-line in the body of work, despite some quite excitable genre-jumping that I tend to be partial to."

Key Artists & Releases: "Cherrystones has been central to the label," says Reid. "His selections and compilations are highly revered and his work has shone a light on the lesser-known artists. His two 'Critical Mass' compilations are essential for anyone interested in the outliers of late 1970s and early 80s post-punk and electronic music. The Vox Populi! compilation feels like a key release for the recent era.

"The label has never been beholden to genre (although often gravitating towards post-punk and electronics) but this collection from the mythical French group pulls in so many other sounds I dearly love – kosmische, new age, folk, industrial. Among the contemporary artists, I always enjoy working with Autumns, aka Christian Donaghey from Derry. He's super-prolific and dedicated to his sound. It's been a pleasure to watch his evolution from scuzzy no wave to making really heavy Adrian Sherwood-inspired dubby post-punk."

Future Plans: "The Irish underground is incredible at the moment and that's something I'm keen to share. We have albums on the way from Elaine Howley, Natalia Beylis and Documenta – and I'm hoping that more weird and wonderful contemporary Irish music continues to come my way.

"Outside of the archival releases, which requires a lot of sleuthing and licensing work, most of the early catalogue is formed from new projects close friends were sitting on. Great music was always nearby. Recently, we've navigated the label into some new territories. Slimming down pressing quantities has actually made the label more ambitious and successful in terms of what we can put out. It's also taking off pressure in what is economically, politically and environmentally, a totally bonkers time to be running a record label."

Any Other Business? "My main aims are to be content with the work we do and continue to represent the artist's vision as best we can," affirms Reid. "It is slightly weird to work in what Eric Isaacson from Mississippi Records calls 'the golden age of the reissue'. You are sometimes releasing contemporary music thinking, 'Yeah, someone's gonna really dig this in 30 years!' The label has never been particularly zeitgeisty – the releases feel quite timeless. I'm happy about that."

For more, visit touchsensitiverecords.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Elaine Howley on the first and last records she bought, and a go-to album

FIRST

YEAH YEAH YEAHS

Fever To Tell

INTERSCOPE, 2003

"I remember buying this in my early teens and rinsing it. The ferocious sound of the three-piece is so angular and groovy. Karen O's performance is electric – she blazes a path across the album. The guitar sounds really stand out. This was fun, heavy music – modern rock 'n' roll that spoke to me. My friend Albert put them on in Limerick – I have heard great things about that gig."

LAST

NALA SINEPHRO

Space 1.8

WARP, 2021

"The last album I bought at Cork's Plugd Records was 'Space 1.8' by Caribbean-Belgian artist Nala Sinephro. This is such a soothing, divine record – I love how it unfolds. The blend of harp, field recordings, piano, drums and synthesisers is gorgeous, and there's a lot of space and breath in the music. When I want to drift away, this is my go-to. The record spins out and then regrounds the listener as it goes. I'd love to see this music live one day. 'Space 2' and closing track 'Space 8' are two favourites."

ALWAYS

SIBYLLE BAIER

Colour Green

ORANGE TWIN, 2006

"I find myself returning often to German folk singer Sibylle Baier's 'Colour Green' album. It has a forlorn, wistful quality and captures her private world in a way that really sticks. Every song is like a short story. I like how it feels domestic and everyday but has an extraordinary timeless quality. The sound is really woody and tape-like. For me, the standout tracks are 'Tonight' and 'Driving'."

ELAINE HOWLEY

The Distance Between Heart And Mouth

TOUCH SENSITIVE

Spellbinding debut from Cork musician

You might not yet be too familiar with the name Elaine Howley, but it's only a matter of time. As the singer with alt-rock/psych group The Altered Hours, and an established voice in Irish underground bands such as Crevice, Howlbux and Morning Veils, her inaugural solo album is a very welcome aside that looks set to propel the talented Cork musician to greater heights.

There's more than a hint of nostalgia at play. The result of a two-year audio diary, and influenced by the music, radio shows and mixtapes of her youth, 'The Distance Between Heart And Mouth' is essentially an experimental amalgam of Howley's favourite sounds and textures, painstakingly arranged into nine detailed and hugely captivating vignettes. It's a difficult record to pigeonhole, but that's definitely no bad thing – you can't help but fall for its eclectic, strangely transcendental charms.

As with Crevice, the darkwave, future-folk trio Howley formed with fellow Cork musicians Irene Buckley and Roslyn Steer, the album feels very much in the Broadcast/Tirzah mould. Distinctly Trish Keenan-esque at times, Howley's voice shimmers with FX, all hazy and folky, steeped in a deft sonic millefeuille of echoey tremors and distinctly noir-ish hues. Much like the "ambient gothic dreamlands" vibe of Penelope Trappes' recent work, melancholic atmospherics coalesce around you like billowing, low-level mist.

The hallucinatory sonics become progressively more intense, tipping into sensory overload. There's the intimate, dream-like introspection of lead single 'Silent Talk' and the wonky call and response of 'Archeological Longing', palpably hauntological as apparitional whispers weave tantalisingly in and out of the mix. Samples run backwards and forwards, exacerbating the otherworldly nuance.

And so it goes on. Deliciously out of focus, the dubby, warped reverb of 'See Saw Seen' is like a fusion of Adrian Sherwood's On-U Sound and Tirzah's eerie lo-fi electronics. 'Song For Mary Black' is a jazz-tinged ambient curio that magically harnesses the spirit of the Cocteau Twins. Utterly gorgeous. Revealing more of itself and getting better with each and every listen, this magnificent album is the gift that keeps on giving. That Howley recorded and produced the whole thing herself makes it even more of a remarkable opening salvo. Downright essential.

VELIMIR ILIC

DC GORE - PHOTO: HOLLY WHITAKER

DC GORE
All These Things
DOMINO

Formerly the singer with south London analogue popsters Little Cub, this debut long-player by DC Gore – Dominic Gore to his pals – is chock-full of towering electronic earworms. It's not really surprising, given that your man was seemingly obsessed with synths and the Pet Shop Boys from an early age.

Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe's quirky art-pop is certainly a big influence here, particularly on the infectious 'Nietzsche On The Beach' and 'I Like You', both "synthesised to perfection". Gore was also plugged into the likes of Talk Talk, Peter Baumann and Beverly Glenn-Copeland while making 'All These Things', so you get an idea of what a fabulous album it is.

But he could also be Jarvis Cocker's heir apparent. "And domestic man took a stand / Pulled down his trousers on The Strand," he sings on the Cocker-ish 'Millennium People', its "seedy witticism" kicking back against the established order. With the occasional nod to New Order and OMD also in the mix, it's quite the statement, all told. One to watch. **VI**

FAUST
The Faust Tapes
BUREAU B

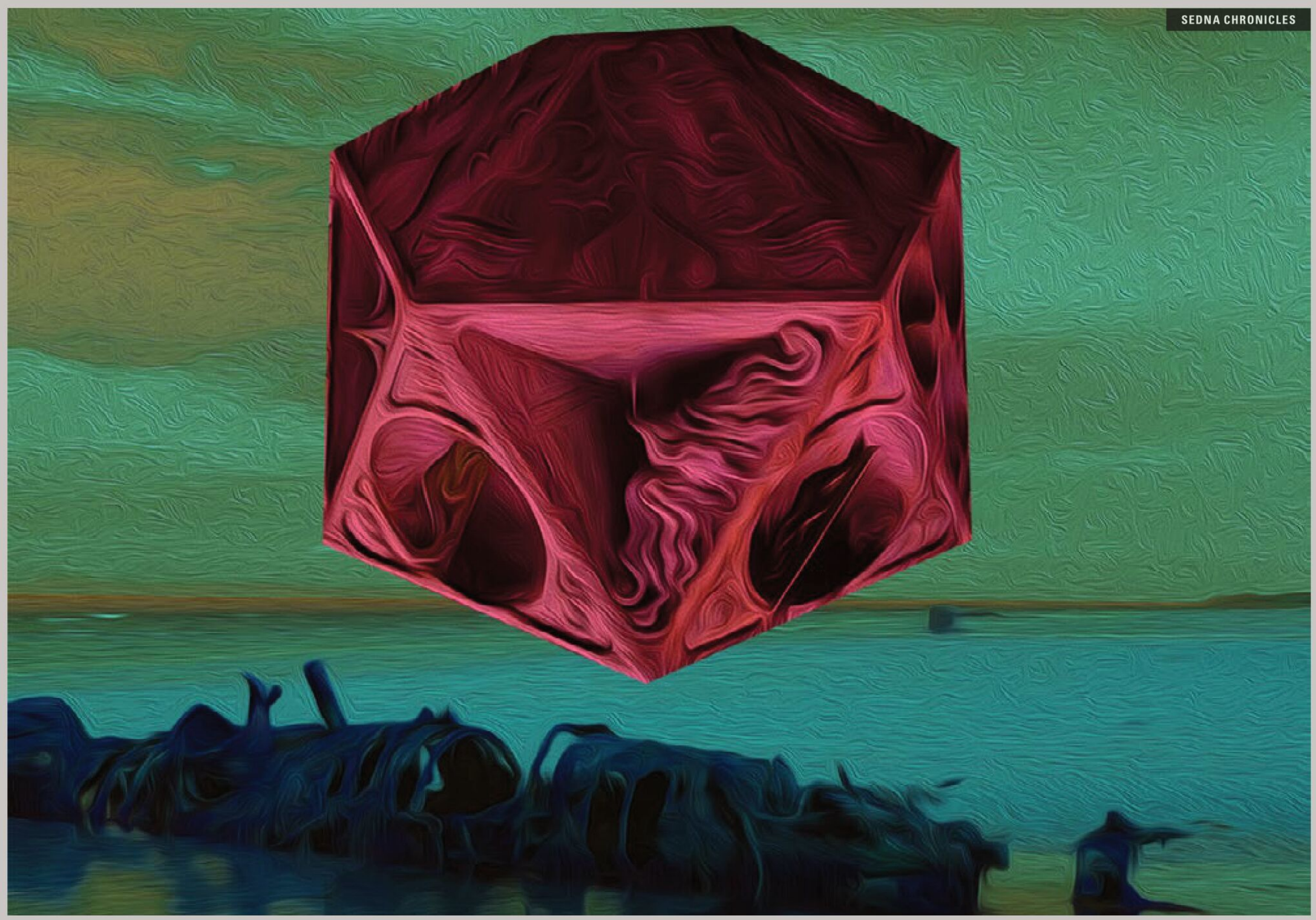
"An album for the price of a single," boasted the original artwork. Faust's budget-friendly 1973 album is, of course, most famous as the cover star of Issue 81 of Electronic Sound magazine. While last year's mega boxset was for dedicated fans, this Bureau B reissue brings Faust's cluttered experimentations to a wider crowd. Loose piano delights on the fuxx funk of 'Flashback Caruso' and a saxophone frolics with wild abandon on 'J'ai Mal Aux Dents', while 'Have A Good Time, Everybody' frustrates its title with so much noise and fury.

There's little point in picking out any of its 26 tracks because, like an art gallery's signature pieces, you really need to step back and appreciate the whole. It's akin to twiddling a radio dial between hippydom and hell, or swiping through the boldest timeline of TikTok. Most of all, it turned a lot of music fans weird – and a lot of them are reading this now. Priceless. **FR**

SCANNER
The Homeland Of Electricity
DiN

The Ukrainian filmmaker Larisa Shepitko is considered an icon of 60s and 70s Soviet cinema, though her career was cut short when she was killed in a car accident at the age of just 40. Her life and work is the inspiration behind 'The Homeland Of Electricity', the second album for DiN by the prolific Robin Rimbaud, aka Scanner. The album title is borrowed from one of Shepitko's films, while the rattling, whirring 'Artemovsk' takes its name from her birthplace.

As well as having excellent taste in movies, Rimbaud's constantly inventive approach to electronics is something to behold. While 2020's 'An Ascent' was the product of live studio improvisation, here he lines his nest with Elektron analogue synths, coaxing out sounds that have a cinematic quality of their own. From the slightly menacing metallic ring of 'Beginning Of An Unknown Century' to the gently sweeping melody and sampled voices that drive 'Another Aircraft', the dance between light and dark here is masterfully directed. **CF**



SEDNA CHRONICLES

Sedna Chronicles

ENGLISH HERETIC

Like a pandemic-era Frodo and Sam, Andy "English Heretic" Sharp and Grey "The Hare And The Moon" Malkin have traversed the occult hotspots of Scotland. The result? A glorious mishmash of ancient and modern folklore.

Take 'Song To The Cliodna', a Celtic spirit whose Russian equivalent, the Vodyanoi, inspired the 1981 BBC drama 'The Nightmare Man', its plotline echoing the wrecked submarines Sharp and Malkin discovered in Aberlady Bay. So we get a lilting Russian lullaby accompanied by radiophonic synths and the fizzles of a distant longwave radio. Keeping up at the back?

Elsewhere, fans of supernatural Victorian seafaring drama will relish 'The Nunavut Letter'. Amid spiky, manipulated strings, Malkin narrates the real-life correspondence of doomed arctic explorer Lt John Irving, Edinburgh-born officer of the notorious HMS Terror.

But the lynchpin is 'Children Of The Cove', a terrific eight-minute exploration of Gilmerton's mysterious caves ("There is something here of an occult nature… something other"). The perfect summation of an album steeped in a very Caledonian sense of the uncanny. **BF**

BETONKUST

Concrete Coast

WORLD OF PAINT

Outsider dance music doesn't get much more oblique or acid-fried than Amsterdam's World Of Paint label, run by Kai Hugo (aka Palmbomen/ Palmbomen II). This bloodshot slice of 80s analogue electro-goth is testament to that.

Utrecht-born maverick Betonkust – Dutch for "concrete coast", hence the title – has a knack of capturing the ambivalent energy of the northern European prosaic (think German photographer Andreas Gursky's compelling work), somehow channelling it into dance music that's both deceptively substantial and unexpectedly emotive.

So, the blurred, enigmatic synthpop that is '9000 Tears' sounds like something Depeche Mode might've conjured after a sleepless weekender, while the irresistible 'Make It Worse' would pack any 80s dancefloor.

The highlight, however, is break-up ode 'Text On Your Birthday', a deliciously warped, retro-futuristic europop delight. Recommended. **CG**

ERASURE

Day-Glo (Based On A True Story)

MUTE

During interviews about 2020's vibrant tour de force 'The Neon', Erasure's Vince Clarke kept referring to a spin-off project he called "the alternative Neon" – not remixes or recycled versions of the original tracks, but enlightening journeys through the sounds that made the album such an interesting project for him.

To these tracks were added atypical Andy Bell vocals in the form of new half-songs – wordless textures from the original demos and brief snatches of candid interview recordings. It finds the duo at their most sonically adventurous since 1995's 'Erasure'.

With the intricate layers and mechanistic rhythmics of 'Pin-Prick', Clarke nods toward his 1981 Depeche Mode B-side 'Ice Machine', while 'Now' highlights his enduring capacity for soul-stirring melodies, with Bell's vocal adding a joyous dimension without him singing a single identifiable word. It takes the enticing after-hours energy of 'Inside Out' to escape from the soundscapes elsewhere, all ground-up synths and impulsive beats framing an exciting new slant on Erasure's distinctive oeuvre. **MS**

TIM BOWNESS

Butterfly Mind

INSIDE OUT MUSIC

Art-pop veteran finds reasons to be hopeful

"The sickness is real / It's all you can feel now". No-Man frontman Tim Bowness adopts an Orwellian tone in 'Say Your Goodbyes, Pt 1', the chthonic opening salvo of this, his seventh solo collection. Prowling arpeggios explode into authoritarian beats and the megaphone diktats of some unseen despot. The reprise at the end of the album offers little hope, either. "The silence won't protect you / The noise will bring you down," he croons, every inch the sinister Minister for Dystopian Opportunities. But fear not, browbeaten children of the pandemic! Take heart, weary casualties of the populist shitfest! In between, there is still hope, defiance and some splendid musical diversions.

The resistance begins with 'Always The Stranger'. Named after Bowness' own teenage musical project, it's a breathy clatter of joyous guitar jangles and a celebration of deliciously insecure creativity ("Waiting for someone to tell you, you did OK…"). 'Only A Fool' has jerky, post-punk beats and Magazine's Dave Formula on keyboards. And 'Lost Player' feels like a descendant of Joy Division's 'Atmosphere', with Bowness mining long-buried childhood feelings for respite from the morass ("Come back awkward ways / Come back cowboy days / Come back sweet escape / The world's been set ablaze…").

Perhaps it's a reaction to the focused intensity of his last two albums, but Bowness feels unleashed here. The 2019 No-Man album 'Love You To Bits' was a beat-heavy sift through the ashes of a destructive relationship, and 2020's solo 'Late Night Laments' was lushly downbeat. But – true to its title – 'Butterfly Mind' flits delightfully, perhaps most in thrall to Bowness' formative love of all things prog. On the strident 'We Feel', Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson weaves quicksilver flute between the driving guitars of Van Der Graaf Generator's Peter Hammill.

Bowness' working title was 'Against Oblivion' and he offers slivers of hope throughout, most touchingly in the Scott Walker-esque 'About The Light That Hits The Forest Floor'. "In love, you are more than yourself," he whispers. "You just need to keep escaping…" The message is clear – salvation from this ongoing torpor lies only in the heart. Those looking to bolt for the hills with a head full of dreams could barely find a better soundtrack than this heartfelt, heroically eclectic album.

BOB FISCHER

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rare SSR Electronica '88-94 (Crammed Archives 1)

CRAMMED DISCS

Hidden gems from the SSR vault

Crammed Discs has always looked inexorably forward. That said, having recently celebrated 40 years in the business, the Belgian label could be forgiven for pausing to take a look back at some of its great achievements over the years. The 'Made To Measure' series, where artists on the roster get to explore their more avant-garde side, has been reanimated and is currently spoiling us with vintage editions and future classics. And now comes a flurry of SSR releases – buried treasure, deleted CDs and rarities from 1988 onwards, uncovering some of the 200 or so releases from the key dance wing of the imprint.

Back in the benighted 80s, alternative houses like Crammed couldn't be seen to be associating with dance music, so SSR was set up as an outpost in a move aimed at placating the indie doctrinaires. Standing for "Sampling & Sans Reproche", SSR is a pun on "sans peur et sans reproche", a phrase apparently originally said of the French knight Pierre Terrail, Seigneur De Bayard (meaning "beyond fear and without reproach"). SSR was represented with a coat of arms featuring a pair of scissors, indicating its devotion to the philosophy of the cut-up. Sampling, though, could have just as easily been replaced with the words "synthesising" or "sequencing", if it didn't ruin the already tortured pun. Now that purism has been all but driven out of music fandom, Crammed is able to bring SSR in from the cold, and here we have 24 tracks that are guaranteed to keep you warm.

This archival digital release draws from five EPs that were issued between 1988 and 1994, including work from The Gruesome Twosome, the collective that included Israeli vocalist Samy Birnbach of Minimal Compact, and Norwegian house maverick Per Martinsen, better known as Mental Overdrive. Post-punk pioneer Birnbach was instrumental in driving SSR alongside Crammed supremo Marc Hollander, while that Nordic influence from artists like Martinsen is strong.

Indeed, two tracks here are from Bleep, aka Geir Jenssen, who would later adopt Biosphere as his handle. Bleep's 'The Launchpad' closes the show and is one of the compilation highlights, though if by any chance you're not exhausted come the end, then be sure to check back for Solar Quest's 15-minute trance epic 'Acid Nation'.

JEREMY ALLEN

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
JOE BANKS,
IMOGEN BEBB,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
FREDDIE HUDSON,
VELIMIR ILIC,
ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH,
BEN MURPHY,
FAT ROLAND,
JOE SILVA,
MAT SMITH,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

This month, our regular columnist has locked himself away in the stationery cupboard with a huge pile of letters from readers...

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION: FAT ROLAND

As you know, every few months Electronic Sound asks me to answer letters from its loyal readers. Please don't check back issues of the magazine to see if this is true. Our mailbag is so bulging, the local post office have sent us several formal complaints. Which have only made things worse. Anyway, let's take a look at some of our recent correspondence…

Edna Pifflewang from Nether Stirling writes: *"What is it with music these days? You can't hear the words and it's all computers. Why can't they play real instruments like lutes?"*

Thanks for that, Edna. Perhaps you would like to have lived in the second century, when guitars were made of syphilis and cowpats. People like you make me sick. If you write to Electronic Sound again, I'm going to stick this magazine… Sorry, what was that? I have to be polite to our readers? Dammit. OK, let's reset.

Alan Cake from Flannel-on-Thames says: *"I enjoy reading ES. But there's a page at the back that just seems to be random words, as if a fat man has slipped in a pool of his own lard and landed face-first on his keyboard. Can't we have something more interesting here, like paint drying or maybe something by Gary Barlow?"*

Reading between the lines, Alan, I presume you're referring to Under The Influence, or the Welcome To Electronic Sound bit by Punch or Marcus or whatever their names are. To be honest, I only skimmed your letter because I was mid-air having slipped on some lard… Oh, erm, heck, erm… Right, let's move on.

The KLF from The Land Of MuMu, near Anglesey, ask: "*What time is love?"*

I suspect that this is Mr Cauty and Mr Drummond looking to plug their '3AM Eternal' single. Got to keep those streaming figures up. However, the answer is either ATB's 1999 trance hit '9PM (Till I Come)' or, if you're in a rush, Silver Bullet's 1989 breakbeat classic '20 Seconds To Comply'. I once asked Chris Martin this question and he simply said 'Clocks' by Coldplay, which was a rubbish answer and made the rest of our time in the pantomime cow very awkward.

Nathaniel Teapot from Wither Clenge writes: *"Good morning, Electronic Sound. I have my fist stuck in a Pringles tube. Please help."*

Hahaha. What an amusing scenario, Nathaniel. You're a one-man sitcom, like 'Fawlty Towers' with just Manuel, or 'Porridge' with just Christopher Biggins. I would suggest butter or lube or cat vomit. Or maybe listen to some hair rock bands – Poison, Mötley Crüe or The Lighthouse Family – and you'll soon be thumping the air so hard that troublesome crisps container will be flying off your stupid hand. Great letter, by the way.

Sharon Crankshaft from Flott says: *"I have my fist stuck in a Pringles tube. Can you please assist?"*

What? No, that can't possibly be right. Let's look at another one.

Dexter Yacht-Humper from Little Nesquick writes: *"I have my fist stuck in a Pring…"*

Come on people, this is getting silly now. Hang on, let me sift through these letters… Pringles… Pringles… Another Pringles one… Pringles… More Pringles… Ah, here we go…

"Dear ES. I have my buttocks wedged into a Pot Noodle tub. Any advice? PS, it's King Size."

Oh, chuff off.

The rest of the letters are either more crisp conundrums, bad poetry or crayon drawings of willies. This letters page theme was a really terrible idea. And nobody actually wants feedback anyway. Electronic Sound isn't a democracy. It's not like Kraftwerk do a Q&A session in the middle of an extended wig-out of 'Showroom Dummies'.

Stop reading, you lot. Go on, get away from here. Off you shoo. I might keep the crayon willies for later, though. I feel a stirring in my mailbag. And if this thought disturbs you, don't write in to complain. For all our sakes.

CHORD

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